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ABSTRACT

In 1974, residents of East Humboldt Park, one of the oldest working class communities in Chicago, Illinois, gathered together in a common effort to reverse the process of urban decay and deterioration in their community. With the help of a hired consultant, the citizens planned the future of their community, a process that was completed in 1976, and resulted in a three year program for improvement of the area. Activities during the planning process intersected with many of the forces that affect urban life including political leadership, flight to the suburbs, downtown business interests, religious institutions, rekindling of old neighborhoods, the upward mobility of in-migrants, racial and ethnic transition, the traffic of new expressways, and comprehensive planning for the city as a whole. This report focuses on the dilemmas that the planners faced in relation to these forces, and the strategies that they adopted to resolve emergent problems. The report concludes by discussing the comprehensive neighborhood plan that the community planners formulated, entitled "Program for Improvement: 1977-1980." The program is described as an alternate strategy for inner city neighborhood improvement, that does not require replacement of poor and moderate income residents with an established middle class. Potential problems and prospects for implementation of the program are explored. (MJL)

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Reviving an Inner City Community

The drama of urban change in East Humboldt Park in Chicago.

Ed Marciniak

President of the
Institute of Urban Life

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Foreword

Among the litany of urban problems cited by urban experts as contributing to the decline of the large American city, the flight of the middle class to the suburbs will always appear. With the middle class goes its income, education, job skills, and sense of civic responsibility. Those who stay in the city, either willingly or unwillingly, find themselves citizens of a city government burdened financially by the services it must provide for its elderly, poor, and other dependents. If central city decline is to be stopped or reversed, it is imperative that the city's neighborhoods be stabilized in order to retain and attract the middle class.

If Chicago is the city that works, then it works only as well as its neighborhoods. One Chicago neighborhood which proved that it could plan was East Humboldt Park, where neighborhood forces came together to attack blight, to revitalize social and economic institutions, and to ensure growth and development. If East Humboldt Park succeeds, it will encourage other neighborhoods to engage in similar planning and development processes. Thus, this study is presented as the first of a series devoted to neighborhood revival in Chicago.

Ed Marciniak offers the ideal background for one who writes about neighborhoods in Chicago. A life-long resident of Chicago, Mr. Marciniak served as Director of the Commission on Human Relations and a Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Development and Planning for the City of Chicago. He has been involved in numerous neighborhood projects and directed several neighborhood studies, including Lawndale, Uptown, and the Lower North Side. As President of the Institute of Urban Life, he works with a variety of urban agencies on programs to improve Chicago and its neighborhoods.

Robert W. Kustra, Director
Center for Research in Urban Government
Loyola University of Chicago

Preface

In this report I describe the efforts of East Humboldt Park, one of Chicago's oldest working class communities, to reverse the process of urban decay and deterioration. Standing together in 1974, the residents decided to hire their own planner who would help them shape the future of their community.

Late in 1976, the residents finished their planning and came up with a three-year program for the improvement of their neighborhood. During these years, their planning activities intersected with many of the forces that mold the urban tomorrow: political leadership, the flight to the suburbs, downtown business interests, religious institutions, "redlining" of older neighborhoods, the upward mobility of in-migrants, racial and ethnic transition, the traffic of new expressways, the city's comprehensive planning, and others. Thus, East Humboldt Park is a microcosm of the powerful influences that are transforming not only Chicago but also large cities everywhere. As a portrait in miniature of urban neglect and plans for revitalization, East Humboldt Park's prospects reflect the future of Chicago itself.

In the urban centers of this nation, hundreds of other neighborhoods are at a turning point. Facing the stress of economic and social crosscurrents that energize or enervate the twentieth century metropolis, residents assert themselves to fashion a future for their neighborhood. To apply East Humboldt Park's experience to other neighborhoods, only the names of streets, churches, leaders, etc. would have to be changed. Yet East Humboldt Park may be unique. What gives a new twist to this story and casts a shadow on its future is the presence of a larger community organization which claims to represent it and five other neighboring communities as well.

While written at the request of the Ford Foundation, this report is addressed to the families who vitalize such neighborhoods and who seek to preserve their values. While factual and historical, the report does not pretend to be disinterested. I fell in love with East Humboldt Park and its residents. I sympathized with their aspirations. And now, in this report, I want to help articulate the dilemmas that need resolution if the community is to revive itself.

In preparing this report, I especially appreciate the help given me by Andrew Rodriguez, who attended countless meetings and reported them sensitively and faithfully.

E.M.

1

Mapping the Community

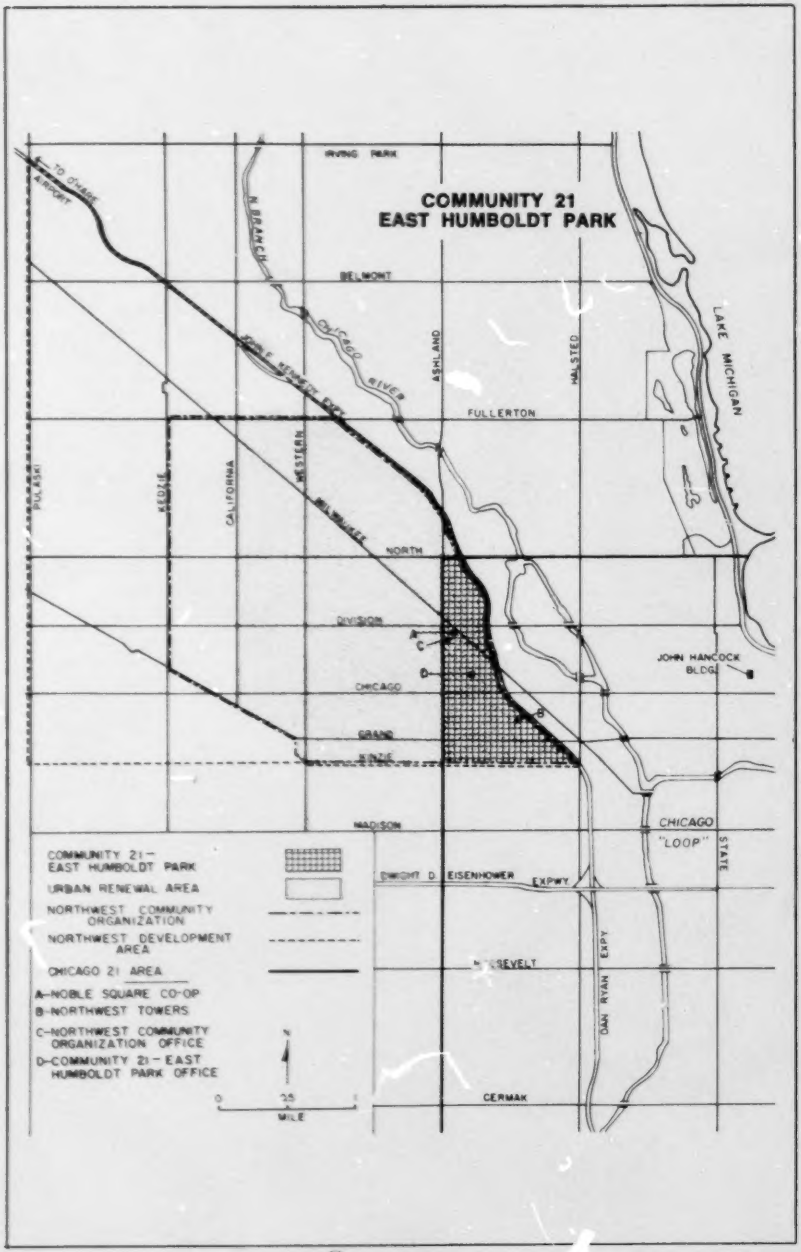
A sense of neighborhood haunts our history and our fondest memories.—David Morris and Karl Hess, Neighborhood Power: The New Localism

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Chicago thrived as a city of neighborhoods. They gave support to families moving up the economic and social ladder and supplied the political and social cement which held the city together. They took the hodgepodge of nationalities, races, languages and cultures, the rich and poor, the skilled and the poorly educated and blended them into a lively, livable Chicago.

Beginning in the 1940's, however, city neighborhoods began to vanish one by one: dissolved by racial change, ripped apart by newly-built expressways, nibbled away by parking lots and gasoline stations, gobbled up by land-starved hospitals and universities, abandoned by the flight to the suburbs. The end of this trend appears to be nowhere in sight.

"Community 21—East Humboldt Park" is the name given to the "newest" community in Chicago. This community boasts a proud history of Polish settlement dating back to the 19th century but has existed as "Community 21—East Humboldt Park" only since 1973 when it acquired new borders. Though it covers approximately one square mile and houses more than 20,000 residents, East Humboldt Park* will not be found on any city map or listed in the 1975–76 telephone directory. This blue-collar community can be found tucked away behind Kennedy Expressway on the city's near northwest side, lying two miles west of Lake Michigan. Its southeast corner comes close to touching the Loop area, Chicago's central business district. Shaped somewhat like a right triangle, the area has as its western boundary North Ashland Avenue which stands perpendicular to West Kinzie Street, the southern border. Kennedy Expressway hastening

*Throughout the following pages East Humboldt Park will be used as the name of the "Community 21 – East Humboldt Park" area.


COMMUNITY 21
EAST HUMBOLDT PARK
IRVING PARK
N. BRANCH
CHICAGO RIVER
BELMONT
ASHLAND
HALSTED
LAKE MICHIGAN
FULLERTON
MILWAUKEE
NORTH
DIVISION
CHICAGO
GRAND
MADISON
JOHN HANCOCK BLDG.
CHICAGO "LOOP"
STATE
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER EXPWY
ROOSEVELT
DAN RYAN EXPY
CERMAK
PULASKI
KEDZIE
CALIFORNIA
WESTERN
COMMUNITY 21 – EAST HUMBOLDT PARK
URBAN RENEWAL AREA
NORTHWEST COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION
NORTHWEST DEVELOPMENT AREA
CHICAGO 21 AREA
A–NOBLE SQUARE CO-OP
B–NORTHWEST TOWERS
C–NORTHWEST COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION OFFICE
D–COMMUNITY 21 – EAST HUMBOLDT PARK OFFICE
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northwest to O'Hare Airport becomes the uneven hypotenuse that completes the triangle at North Avenue, the northern limit.

How many square blocks are contained in the East Humboldt Park area? It is almost impossible to tell. Chicago may be world famous for its convenient gridiron of north and south streets, but here the traditional grill pattern is frequently broken up by short diagonal avenues. A few alleys have been converted into streets, and because of the expressway, dozens of side streets become dead-ends. The street layout is distinctly and fittingly Old World.

The report that follows chronicles the adventures of East Humboldt Park residents as, guided by the professional planner whom they had hired, they searched for the Promised Land, an urban neighborhood which they could call their own. During 1975 and 1976, the residents had to confront questions such as these:

- In what kind of urban ecology is a neighborhood most likely to survive?
- Will the city in the future be willing to generate the conditions under which neighborhoods can flourish—neighborhoods as we have known and experienced them?
- What are the human and physical prerequisites of successful neighborhood planning?
- How will unofficial community planning be viewed by city officials?
- Are neighborhoods still viable and necessary for the good urban life?
- Are they charming anachronisms, like the horse-drawn wagon?
- Are they a throwback to the last century, a nostalgia for what once was but will never be again?
- In an unromantic technological vision of urban America is there any room for city neighborhoods in the remaining decades of this century?
- Is the social investment in a neighborhood and its institutions less valuable than the newer investment of public works and private development?
- Where is the happy balance to be found between yesterday's city and the urban tomorrow?

The East Humboldt Park residents whose story will be told in these pages strongly believe that the neighborhood is indispensable for the good life and that urban planners who are indifferent to the care and cultivation of neighborhoods should be resisted. The issues which East Humboldt Park faced in 1975 and 1976 and which will confront it throughout the rest of this century can be seen as the legacy of its past.

Can East Humboldt Park leaders exercise a stewardship wise enough to replenish that inheritance which has been woefully neglected and heavily depreciated? Has the area declined so badly that even intensive care will not bring about its recovery? Without an appreciation of the history of the East Humboldt Park area, there can be little understanding of where the area's future really does lie, and where planning had to begin.

2

What Is Past Is Prologue

Despite what some people along the lakefront think, the neighborhoods are *Chicago — the color, the vigor, the poetry, yes even much of the architectural beauty of the city. Michigan Avenue is one of the wonders of the world, but so in its own way is Halsted Street. Lake Shore Drive is a splendid, sweeping thoroughfare, but don't forget the charms of Milwaukee Avenue.—Andrew Greeley, in his foreword to* Historic City: The Settlement of Chicago

Warsaw of the West

The East Humboldt Park area has its roots sunk deep into Chicago's past; its Old World ancestry is visible everywhere. Prior to World War I, and for decades afterwards, Chicago was known as the "Warsaw of the West" because it was home for the second largest concentration of Poles throughout the world.

Before Poland regained its political sovereignty in 1918, Chicago was the unofficial capital of *Polonia,* that spiritual community of millions of Poles who longed and worked for the day when Poland would again be free and independent. In Chicago, *Polonia* was centered around the three-way intersection of West Division Street, North Ashland Avenue and Northwest Milwaukee Avenue. That crossroads, and its adjacent streets, came to be known as the "Polish Downtown." There Polish was the language of commerce, sermons in church and neighborly greetings. In that vicinity were located, for example, the nation-wide headquarters of the Polish National Alliance, the Polish Women's Alliance and the Polish Roman Catholic Union. Four Polish-language dailies flourished there in the early 1920's; one, the *Dziennik Zwiazkowy,* still survives.

Within easy walking distance were the Polish Museum of North America and three Catholic churches, each large enough to command

Looking northwest on Milwaukee Avenue from Ashland Avenue, 1906. (Courtesy Chicago Historical Society)

cathedral status. St. Stanislaus Kostka, founded in 1867, is a near-legend. It once served 10,000 Polish families. In 1893, the year of the Chicago World's Fair, St. Stanislaus was hailed as the largest Catholic parish in the world, with over 2,000 baptisms, 1,000 funerals, and nearly 400 weddings in a single year. The cornerstone of Holy Trinity Church, less than two blocks away, was laid a few years later. Holy Innocents Church, built last, is still the center of a vigorous parish community. Today their Polish names, etched in stone over entrances, persist as mute witnesses of the past. Most of the parishioners who attend these churches today cannot translate their Polish titles: for example, *Kosciol Swietej Trojcy* means the Church of the Holy Trinity.

Milwaukee Avenue, called "the street that's [illegible]ure Chicago," runs diagonally through the heart of East Humboldt Park. Originally an Indian trail, it later became one of the city's first plank roads. It guided horses, pedestrians and wagons traveling to Chicago through the quagmire and giant mudholes of a spring thaw or winter slush. It also permitted Chicagoans to move out from the city's center. When novelist Henryk Sienkewicz, author of *Quo Vadis* and a Nobel prize winner, visited Chicago nearly 100 years ago, Milwaukee Avenue tantalized his senses. He wrote:

> Doors and windows began to open and the first words I heard were in Polish. About 8 o'clock the children began to swarm here on the way to school. Their chirping made a strange impression upon me, for despite the fact that these children were studying in a Polish school, an English influence was clearly perceptible in their speech.

Then as today Milwaukee Avenue was a street of bustling commerce and movement, sweeping the upwardly mobile along its diagonal course to newer neighborhoods and suburbs farther northwest.

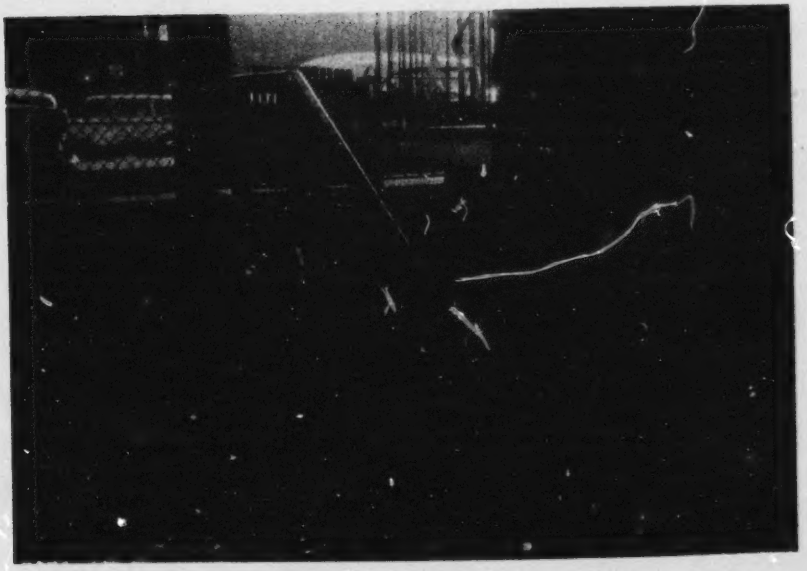
Pre-1900 Housing and Vaulted Sidewalks

Old Milwaukee Avenue and the "Polish Downtown" were sections of the city untouched by the Great Chicago Fire of 1871 because they lay just west of the north branch of the Chicago River, at whose banks the ravaging holocaust finally halted. That explains why there are, scattered throughout the East Humboldt Park area, frame houses built more than 100 years ago—all originally put up without indoor plumbing or central heating. When the homes east of the river were devoured by the fire, refugees crossed the river and quickly built up the area.

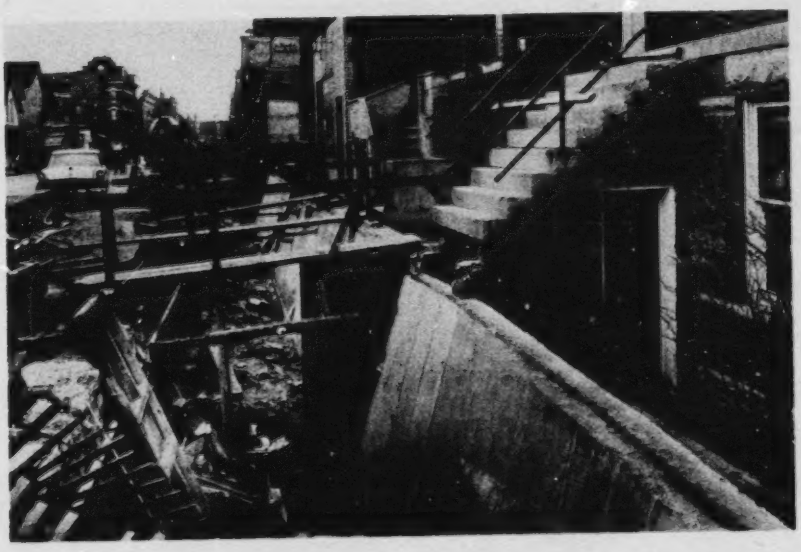
By 1900 vacant lots were few and far between. The new buildings which now dominated the landscape were brick, mostly one, two and three stories high. Many still stand—small, very old looking, but solid. Unaffected, in the main, by escalating property values, these houses continue to provide lower income families with apartments at some of the lowest rents in the city.

While this rapid residential expansion was occurring in the last half of the nineteenth century, the city's civil engineers began to correct Chicago's original mistake. Much of the old city had been built on swampland bordering the Chicago River. Most houses were constructed on flat land so low that flooding was inevitable. The streets, less than two feet above the river level, became linear mudholes whenever it rained. After much debate, the city began elevating new streets and sidewalks as high as four feet above the ground, locating water mains, sewers and utilities underneath. For decades, cubicles under the sidewalks housed the outdoor water closets. These are now used as sheds. Throughout the East Humboldt Park area there are hundreds of homes where the view from the first floor window is obstructed by a solid wall of concrete and stone supporting a vaulted sidewalk. From this vantage the viewer has no way to see the other side of the street. Bridge-like walkways connect the second floor entrances of houses to the street, though some buildings are still entered by a row of steps leading down to a doorway below the sidewalk level. Many a tiny lot accommodates two houses, the older one in the rear, moved there to permit the construction of the newer and better-built house fronting the street. Few residences have been built since 1900, though some yellow-brick bungalows were constructed on vacant lots in the 1960's under a federally-subsidized housing program.

Until World War II the East Humboldt Park area continued to be a visitor's mecca, a charming old world neighborhood nestling in the shadow of modern skyscrapers, a port of entry for Polish immigrants, and a center of Polish culture, social life, and publishing. With a population that was predominantly Catholic, the churches were full, their parish



Two views of a vaulted sidewalk. Above, side view showing stairs from original grade. Below, view showing concrete retaining walls.



schools overflowing. In 1933, a depression year, the schools of St. Stanislaus Kostka and Holy Trinity together enrolled almost 4,000 students. Polish Downtown had survived as a solid, working class neighborhood. There were few hints that trouble might be loitering around the corner.

Changes After World War II

After World War II, the neighborhood, with its traditions and stability, began to change and crumble. As war veterans returned and married, they, like generations before them, used Milwaukee as their avenue of upward mobility. With their babies and rented trailers they left "the old neighborhood" for newer settlements and suburbs farther northwest. As they left, some shortened their names by chopping off the final "ski."

Since the Polish immigration was now much smaller than before, the places they emptied were gradually taken by new ethnic groups, mainly Puerto Ricans who surged into the city and who were delighted to take advantage of the low rents on the near northwest side during an era of postwar housing shortages. Along with this stream of newcomers, blacks began to inch their way along the area's southern edges which, badly zoned, had become a checkerboard of residential and industrial properties, full of activity during the daytime, deserted and dangerous at night. New ethnic settlements, mostly Puerto Rican but occasionally Mexican, now mingled with old institutions, mostly Polish and Italian. Latino accents, generally falling from younger lips, were heard more often than Slavic ones, which usually came from older residents.

Churches felt the change immediately as stalwart parishioners bid farewell, sold their homes and exited via Milwaukee Avenue. Sunday attendance shrunk, as did the size of the weekly collection. St. Boniface parish, whose original German parishioners had migrated north two generations earlier, eventually had a tri-lingual kindergarten whose teacher spoke Polish, Spanish and English. A drug store, not far away, displayed in its window a tripartite sign which read:

> Mowimy po Polsku
>
> Se Habla Espanol
>
> We speak English

Merchants grumbled about the exodus of steady customers and about the need to re-stock exotic (to them) merchandise and to alter their selling and advertising methods in order to appeal to newly-arriving Puerto Ricans. Some merchants simply refused to accommodate themselves and either retired or relocated their stores farther up Milwaukee Avenue. Neighborhood politicians, not fully comprehending what was happen-

ing, prayed that the situation would stop changing, but were grateful that the new arrivals, when they did vote, supported the existing political leadership.

The City Reacts: The Expressway

In the 1950's, the city government took two steps which were to shape the near northwest side for the second half of the century.

The city began planning the construction of a new expressway, later named for President John F. Kennedy after his assassination. It would link the Loop business district with the recently-built O'Hare Airport at the city's far northwest edge and with those interstate highways which circled the city on their way to Indiana and Wisconsin. To begin the pouring of concrete for sixteen miles of high-speed roadway, hundreds of homes had to be demolished, and their occupants relocated. Many of the dispossessed families lived along the eastern border of what is now called the East Humboldt Park area. The expressway caused further evacuation of regular parishioners and retail customers, weakening still more the older institutions which had been the heart of the Polish Downtown.

In the early 1950's, the highway engineers were satisfied that planning was on schedule, until the word leaked out that St. Stanislaus Kostka Church and its schools stood directly in the path of the new expressway. Raze the church? The parishioners let out a howl of protest, so loud that it reverberated down the corridors of City Hall. Before long, they were joined by tens of thousands of former parishioners who reverenced "St. Stan's" as their mother church, even though they now lived in some other city neighborhood or suburb.

The Polish-speaking politicians did not find the political pressure unbearable. They welcomed it! Who would dare challenge their claim that they were the most loyal of the alumni of St. Stan's? The spontaneous uprising of voters had handed the ward aldermen a cause so politically potent that they could justify bucking City Hall. They, too, hurried to enlist in a crusade with which they fully sympathized. Only the expressway designers stood their ground and refused to budge. But their votes were few and thus unimportant. Some of them could not even vote in the city because they lived in the suburbs. Under the protest, Chicago's Department of Public Works finally relented, and its engineers hurriedly revised the blueprints. They rerouted the expressway so that it would curve around St. Stanislaus, not plow through it. Not a stone or brick of the church would be harmed. How did St. Stanislaus celebrate the victory? It began to build still another school!

City Hall had, in fact, caved in. The people of the northwest side, chiefly the Polish pastors and their parishioners, had scored a highly publicized victory. The lesson would not be forgotten — especially during the next decade, the turbulent 1960's when cities began to feel the pressure of community dissent. Everybody now understood that the

bulldozer was not invincible; that it could be blocked; that City Hall was not the Rock of Gibraltar; and that a community had power if it was organized.

Urban Renewal Comes to East Humboldt Park

The second step taken by the city came in response to pleas from local aldermen for help in checking the progressive deterioration of their community. The city's Department of Urban Renewal (DUR) in 1958 designated the six square miles just northwest of the Loop, on either side of Milwaukee Avenue, including all of the East Humboldt Park area, as a "conservation" area. That official designation was possible because DUR had determined that the residential section was in danger of becoming a slum or a blighted area. While this official city action raised many a homeowner's eyebrow and prompted countless questions about the city's plans, nothing tangible happened as an immediate consequence of DUR's action. That was to come later.

The Community Reacts: Organizing the Residents

Within the conservation area outlined by DUR, there were dozens of churches forming a mosaic of ethnic groups, the Poles being the largest and the Ukrainians next. In 1961, seeking a way to stem the out-migration of loyal parishioners and to arrest community deterioration, the pastors of twenty-two large Catholic parishes called upon Cardinal Albert Gregory Meyer, the archbishop of Chicago, for assistance. He turned for help to Monsignor John Egan, director of the archdiocesan Office of Urban Affairs, who promptly enlisted the aid of Saul Alinsky, executive director of the Industrial Areas Foundation. Cardinal Meyer gave his wholehearted endorsement to Monsignor Egan's proposal for a new community organization. Alinsky offered not only tactical advice but also his best organizer. And once again Monsignor Egan demonstrated his power of persuasion by convincing pastors, Catholic high school principals and hospital administrators to underwrite the costs of a two-year budget so that the Northwest Community Organization (NCO) could get under way. The boundaries of this new organization would be slightly larger than those of DUR's conservation area and would embrace the smaller triangular section now called East Humboldt Park, the subject of this report.

Local Protestant churches, settlement houses, fraternal groups and other institutions were not left out. When invited to become full-fledged partners in NCO, most of them responded by joining the new "umbrella" organization. By the time of its first annual congress in 1962, NCO claimed a membership of 177 local groups and promptly sought to represent the entire near northwest side.

The operating principles which steered the Northwest Community

Organization through the early 1960's have not changed much since then. Then and now, the organization would:

- *Rely* upon a dedicated staff willing to work long hours for modest wages. Several full-time organizers would be employed, with back-up support from part-timers.
- *Depend* upon the strength and out-reach of local institutions, particularly churches and organizations, to keep NCO close to the grassroots.
- *Seek* to become the sole spokesman, to City Hall and other government bodies, on behalf of all residents on any issue which might threaten them. Like a labor union, NCO claimed the right to be the exclusive bargaining agent for the community.
- *Avoid* entanglement with the political establishment. With the passage of time, NCO's abiding and conspicuous distrust of local politicians deepened and was eventually extended to embrace the Mayor and various city department heads. This hostility benefited the area's political independents.
- *Be constantly on the prowl* for issues that will rally the residents around a cause; achieve victories that will persuade residents that the community organization is worth their time and support; and never run out of "enemies" who need to be vanquished. In its fifteen years, NCO has, for example, fought panic peddlers, led marches to protest increases in natural gas rates, opposed specific sites for locating new schools, campaigned for the demolition of dilapidated housing, mobilized the community to halt a murderous epidemic of arson in abandoned and family-occupied buildings, and waged an unrelenting war against urban renewal.
- *Adopt* Saul Alinsky's tactics which are shrewdly designed to exploit the mass media's appetite for confrontation: street protest, personal attack, direct action, non-negotiable demands, etc. The Northwest Community Organization survives, after fifteen years, as Chicago's shining example of that distinctive style and strategy for community organization which Alinsky popularized in the early 1960's.

A Community Divided: NCO vs. the Politicians

In the fight to save St. Stanislaus from the expressway, community leaders and elected officials together stood up against the highway engineers in City Hall. But now the Northwest Community Organization was on the scene and an entirely different drama was about to unfold. A stormy feud between NCO and neighborhood politicians was written into the script. Because of its organizing style, its self-conscious independence, and its refusal to extend the customary courtesies to neighborhood politicians, NCO was launched in 1962 not only without their support but in the face of their bitter hostility.

The 31st ward was one of four wards partially located within NCO's boundaries. Its alderman and Democratic ward committeeman, Thomas

E. Keane, was the most powerful person in the Chicago City Council, serving as chairman of its finance committee. Much of another ward, the 26th, also lay within NCO's borders. Its committeeman, Matthew W. Bieszczat, was also secretary of the Democratic Party of Cook County. Its elected alderman was Stanley Zydlo. Neither his name nor that of Bieszczat can be found in the telephone directory.

One early incident, described vividly in the *Saturday Evening Post* (January 25, 1964), set the tone for Keane's and Bieszczat's future relationship to NCO. The article describes the circumstances under which Thomas Gaudette, then the advance organizer for NCO, telephoned Bieszczat:

> Gaudette . . . searched for the one issue that could unite the people in anger. It came when he picked up the phone and called the local ward office . . . . When Gaudette asked him to come to a meeting and help form a people's organization, [Bieszczat] put it simply: "Look, sonny, I own this area. Just keep your two cents out of it. I decide what's going to happen." When he was invited again to the meeting, he bluntly told the Air Force veteran [Gaudette], who was backed by 22 Catholic priests and nearly as many Protestant ministers: "I don't want to talk to you damn Commies." Gaudette was overjoyed; the ward committeeman had given the organizer the issue he sought. In February, 1962, the community held its first meeting with about 400 people in attendance.

Both Keane and Bieszczat continued to make no secret of their contempt for NCO which, in Halloween "trick or treat" fashion, publicly attacked them whenever the opportunity arrived. Over the years those occasions came frequently. Furthermore, NCO's workaday relations with elected officials have not been the kind to encourage their cooperation and support. Not infrequently, NCO staff will set a time, date and place for a public meeting, then invite public officials to be present, without checking any of their schedules or getting in advance their agreement to attend. If they fail to put in an appearance, NCO leaders will proceed to excoriate them.

In fairness, it should be noted that the political leadership of two other wards did work out a friendlier relationship with NCO. Indeed, U.S. Congressman Daniel Rostenkowski, the 32nd ward Democratic committeeman, was a keynote speaker at an NCO Congress in the late 1960's. The ward's current alderman, Terry Gabinski, has taken an active part in meetings convened by the NCO and has publicly supported East Humboldt Park's planning. Alderman Richard F. Mell of the 33rd ward has also attended meetings called by NCO. In contrast to their counterparts in the neighboring 26th ward, Rostenkowski, Mell and Gabinski are listed in the telephone directory.

The Noble Square Urban Renewal Project

In the middle 1960's, after a merry-go-round of feverish negotiations between NCO and the Department of Urban Renewal, the twelve-acre

Noble Square Project was approved. Located in the heart of East Humboldt Park, the project was to build 150 town houses and a twenty-eight story high-rise with 325 apartments. NCO leaders, the Mayor, public officials and residents showed up in front of Holy Trinity Church for the ground-breaking. They did not realize it that day, but Noble Square was to become the first and last urban renewal project within NCO's boundaries. For NCO eventually lived to regret the part it played in supporting an urban renewal project for the near northwest side.

After Noble Square was completed the climate worsened considerably, and the community's guerrilla-like opposition, both verbal and tactical, to urban renewal became more furious than ever because of an unexpected sequence of events. While the city officials and NCO were busy battling with one another, both neglected to keep a watchful eye on what was taking place in the Noble Square high-rise and in a second apartment skyscraper, also completed around 1970 and just inside East Humboldt Park's eastern boundary. The second building, eighteen floors high, was Northwest Towers, a federally-subsidized, 150-apartment building that was not part of any urban renewal project but was identified by the community as one.

After a promising start and some attempts at social planning, both buildings drew most of their occupants from outside the community and failed to remain racially integrated, becoming almost wholly occupied by blacks. The physical upkeep is poor. Both buildings, which are fewer than ten years old, grow visibly shabbier, their exteriors and immediate environment becoming less attractive each year. Even though both high-rises are privately managed, it is urban renewal which is blamed for not achieving a racial balance. Old-timers, especially the Poles who live in the vicinity, even today remain soured and resentful at what they regard as a government-induced racial "invasion" of their neighborhood.

The high-rises can easily be seen from almost any corner of the East Humboldt Park area. Silhouetted against the sky, they stand out as reminders to their neighbors that their worst fears about urban renewal will be justified. Thus urban renewal became, in the lingo of East Humboldt Park streets, the code word for the "enemy." And NCO was being blamed for letting it happen.

Urban Renewal: A Dead-end

Given NCO's organizational style and its collision tactics, further confrontation was predictable. To oversee the city's renewal activities in the northwest area, the Mayor was obligated by law to appoint a Conservation Community Council that would have to approve any urban renewal projects. NCO demanded the right to recommend the voting majority of the Council's membership. In the early 1960's this arrangement worked out, though DUR was not happy about the prolonged delays in reviewing and approving improvement plans.

But as the skirmishes between NCO and the elected officials grew longer and more frequent, the control and composition of the Conservation Council's majority became a major issue. The Mayor finally refused to name the NCO-selected candidates and instead appointed members who were seen as more politically acceptable and more ready to bargain than to stall. To challenge the legality of the Mayor's appointments which, NCO claimed, had to be screened through the neighborhood ranks, NCO went to court and finally won its case in 1970.

As a result of this struggle for control of the Conservation Community Council, NCO's hostility to urban renewal crystallized. No longer was the Noble Square project the solitary symbol of the residents fears of urban renewal. Instead, with fanatic single-mindedness, NCO leaders promoted an image of urban renewal which they equated with mass clearance of homes occupied by low income and blue collar families, homes which would then be replaced by high-rise apartments where rents would be far too expensive for most of those displaced but suitable for middle class tenants.

To solidify neighborhood support for its opposition to urban renewal, NCO produced in 1969 an eleven-page manifesto entitled *People's Conservation Plan,* highly defensive and tightly restricting future developments. The NCO-produced summary called upon the city to observe scrupulously these limitations upon planning for neighborhoods:

1) No buildings may be over three stories.
2) Families who have to be relocated must be offered suitable housing within their community.
3) New homes should be built on vacant land first.
4) New homes should be 40 per cent for low income and 50 per cent for moderate income families.
5) Keep convenient shopping strips.
6) Allow the small neighborhood businessmen to remain.
7) Guarantee that tenants' rent cannot be increased by more than 10 per cent when they are forced to relocate.
8) Keep the number of people living in this community the same.
9) Encourage and implement rehabilitation loans for homeowners.

What was a bitter tug-of-war between NCO and the city government in the 1960's resulted in no genuine victories for either side. The confrontation had become a stalemate. Only the residents lost, as the city's planning and programming for the area ground to a standstill. With shrinking federal resources, the city's Department of Urban Renewal turned its attention to other city neighborhoods where it felt a working relationship could be established with indigenous leaders without wasting years in fruitless negotiation. The stand-off had given NCO what it had wanted: a hands-off policy by the Department of Urban Renewal. But there were unintended consequences. The NCO area simply became a no man's land

in which little happened by way of either major public or private improvements during the first half of the 1970's. By isolating itself from the urban world outside, NCO had unwittingly cut off its constituent communities from vital resources beyond its borders.

3

Reawakening the Community

You can't beat City Hall.—Urban Folklore

The City Planners Come on the Scene

While relationships between NCO and the city's Department of Urban Renewal remained deadlocked, another city agency entered the picture. In 1966 the city's Department of Development and Planning released the *Comprehensive Plan* of Chicago, the first to be published since Daniel Burnham's *Plan of Chicago* was completed in 1909. This *Comprehensive Plan* was designed to enunciate policies for the development of the entire city, and thus it contained no maps or detailed blueprints, either for the city as a whole or for any individual community. Instead, for local planning purposes, the new plan divided the city into sixteen "development areas." For each area the city promised to issue a special planning report.

Two years later, in 1968, the Department of Development and Planning published its report on the Northwest Development Area which included the section of the city staked out by NCO. The report startled no one. It was primarily descriptive of what was, handsomely edited, studiously non-controversial, and equally non-committal about future plans. NCO leaders, after studying it and finding nothing that they could fight about, heaved a sigh of relief and settled back more relaxed than usual. They saw the Northwest Development Area's southeastern boundaries as erecting a new protective wall between themselves and the downtown politicians and private developers. Without expecting any such gift from the city, NCO now felt it had, as it were, its own "official" development area report which could be used to shield residents from encroachment by urban renewal.

In 1970, four years after publication of the original *Comprehensive Plan*, the Department of Development and Planning had finished fifteen of the sixteen development area reports, but not the all-important one for the downtown central business district. The Chicago Central Area Commit-

tee, representing downtown's leading businessmen, had become disturbed by the delay. Fearful of what seemed to be a decline of downtown's commercial, evening and weekend activity, they offered to finance and produce such a plan themselves, as they had done with an earlier plan in 1958. The city agreed but with several provisos, the most notable one being that it did not want a typical downtown plan focused solely on retail, financial, and business interests. That meant, for all practical purposes, that any business concern for the future of Chicago's downtown would also have to encompass the welfare of the residential areas which encircled it and which would inevitably feel the impact of any major downtown improvements.

A New Threat: The Chicago 21 Plan

Finally in 1973, the representatives of the Chicago Central Area Committee announced the completion of the downtown plan in the Mayor's office. Called *Chicago 21,* it was an oversize publication wrapped in a dazzling silver cover and clamoring for attention throughout its 125 multicolored pages. Like a foreign luxury car in a neighborhood of modest bungalows, it created more of a sensation because the owner was nowhere apparent. For the *Chicago 21* report carried no address, no sponsor, no author, no publisher. It did, however, feature a laudatory, introductory letter from the Mayor who urged "full support." It also listed, without any further explanation, the name and title of each member of the Chicago Plan Commission, the Chicago Central Area Committee, and the Chicago City Council, as well as the special consultants who worked on the plan. The list of names read like an abbreviated edition of *Who's Who in Chicago.*

If the parentage of *Chicago 21* was disconcertingly vague, the news release distributed at the inaugural press conference was more straightforward: "The Chicago Central Area Committee today unveiled a plan designed to be the basis for a revitalized city in the 21st century" (hence, the plan's name) and was "now making proposals for the sixteenth development area, the Chicago central communities." A less expensive, twelve-page summary entitled *"Chicago 21, A Plan for the Central Area Communities"* was issued shortly thereafter. In it a footnote indicated that "Copies of this Summary (at no cost) and the complete *Chicago 21* plan (cost: $8.50) are available from the Chicago Department of Development and Planning, Room 1000, City Hall, Chicago, Illinois 60602." It was not until a year later, in 1974, when the Department of Development and Planning issued its "South Loop Town: Guidelines for Development," that *Chicago 21's* ancestry was clearly acknowledged as a "recent development plan for the central area jointly prepared by the city and the private sector."

Beyond the unusual circumstances surrounding its birth, *Chicago 21* was unique in four ways:

- It was not just another highly-publicized promotion for downtown retailers — even though it was plainly interested in their continuing viability.
- It represented a $300,000 investment on the part of the city's business leaders, as well as a major commitment of their time and energy to the revival of the financial and commercial center of the Chicago metropolitan region. The rebuilding of the downtown area was regarded by its businessmen as serious and necessary an operation as open heart surgery.
- The top item on the *Chicago 21* plan's agenda was a specific project: the building of a new-town-in-town on obsolete railroad properties south of the Loop. Dearborn Park, as it was to be called, would, it was hoped, attract 60,000 persons back to the heart of the city.
- No present residents living in the *Chicago 21* area were to be displaced by any of its projects. Wholesale reconstruction of the older residential areas, either for public or private purposes, was barred for the foreseeable future.

Speaking specifically of East Humboldt Park, the *Chicago 21* plan described it as "an older neighborhood which requires upgrading . . . . The population composition of this area is changing and with it community needs. Redevelopment programs identified in this Plan endeavor to reflect that change. In so doing, they support the efforts of residents and developers to continue the improvement of this area." In the words of Jack Cornelius, executive director of the Chicago Central Area Committee, the "surrounding residential communities are viable. They should be kept, improved and strengthened. The people should stay."

Other than the very general references already noted, the *Chicago 21* plan did not contain a single specific proposal or project for the East Humboldt Park area. *What the plan did do, however, was to detach the easternmost portion of the Northwest Development Area, a piece of NCO "territory," and annex it to the central communities area of* Chicago 21. That new boundary line did not just create a problem of overlapping. It telegraphed a disconcerting message to property owners and tenants in East Humboldt Park. Downtown, once again, had designs upon their section of the near northwest side. Their defense perimeter had been penetrated.

The "Birth" of East Humboldt Park

Historically, an urban community is defined, and its boundaries located, by its unique history, by the ethnicity of its residents, by the churches and schools which give it vitality, or by natural barriers, such as a river or a ridge. With the advent of the automobile, city governments responded to a Pied Piper behind the wheel of an auto, pushing expressways through the middle of viable but vulnerable neighborhoods, usually destroying them. Urban ruthlessness poured cement over neighborhoods and institutions upon which previous generations had bestowed

tender care. Once in a while, however, the new highway did turn out to be more or less constructive — by forming the rim of a new community. In this sense, communities have also been determined by forces from without, such as downtown planners. Thanks to them, there was now, on *Chicago 21's* glossy paper at least, a community called "East Humboldt Park," even though the park itself was some two miles to the west. No one, certainly not the area's residents, would have recognized that name as a description of themselves or of their community. Had someone used the name St. Stan's, or St. Boniface, or Polish Downtown, or Santa Maria Adolorata, for example, there might have been instant recognition. A christening had taken place, not in some church but in a downtown architect's office, with the community sponsors not present, either in person or by proxy.

Thus the community of East Humboldt Park was designated in 1973 with a stroke from the pen of a downtown map-maker who shrewdly recognized the dormant community that was already there. As some residents insisted, this was a community temporarily stunned by the sudden impact of rapid population changes. *Chicago 21* sounded the signal to revive it. Still other residents claimed that the newly-sketched boundaries for East Humboldt Park were a happy accident. A local pastor preferred to call it Providence. But whatever the cause, the community which was designated that day in 1973 was to make a unique contribution, in the months to come, to the way that Chicago and its inner city neighborhoods would develop in the future.

As the year 1973 ended, the old "Polish Downtown," now known as East Humboldt Park, had become a significant part of two larger jurisdictions. On the one hand, the Northwest Community Organization claimed to represent the residents because they lived on the near northwest side. On the other hand, East Humboldt Park had also become part of *Chicago 21*, a plan for a downtown-oriented central community.

A Community in Transition

During the 1970's the socio-economic status of East Humboldt Park and the adjoining areas to the west continued to slip. Using 1970 U.S. census data to grade Chicago's seventy-five communities, geographers ranked East Humboldt Park in the lowest fifth. More low-income households, more unskilled wage earners, more families on welfare had moved into the area. As the rainbow-hued population kept shifting, the locality's old and overworked institutions tried desperately to absorb the newcomers. Deferred property maintenance, overcrowding and declining city services hastened deterioration. The commercial strips grew less and less attractive, especially for middle income shoppers.

But some things resisted transformation. The area's seven Catholic elementary and secondary schools still outnumbered the four public schools. Truck traffic on the Kennedy Expressway kept casting its

shadow. On two of its three sides East Humboldt Park remained surrounded by heavy and light manufacturing, railroads, warehouses, and riverfront industries. The single major physical upgrading of the area was to be found underground: a new subway running below Milwaukee Avenue, making it still one of the liveliest streets in town. In the nineteenth century city engineers improved transportation by raising the streets above grade to avoid mud and sink holes. In the twentieth century a fresh generation of engineers went below ground, tunneling a subway to avoid the delays of street-level traffic.

The signs of urban neglect were visible at ground level everywhere. Clutter and litter filled some alleys and parkways, threatening those which were neat and well-swept. Many of the older residences cried for renovation. After decades of wear and tear, streets and sidewalks needed repairs; so did sewers. Unrepaired and unpainted houses with cracked gutters stood next to freshly coated homes. The open sections under the vaulted sidewalks had become dumping grounds for empty bottles, cans and trash.

The dynamics of the East Humboldt Park community were aptly summarized by Father John Hillenbrand, associate pastor of St. Boniface Church which is centrally located in the community:

> This neighborhood is a mixture of Poles, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Blacks, French Creoles, and Italians. The ethnic groups in this community work well together because they're all minorities. They all have the same housing needs. And despite the ethnic variety, there are very few who want to get out.
>
> It's more economical to live here. You can get a four-room apartment for $50, a six-room apartment for $65. It's not luxury but it's adequate. You see, if these people were displaced from their homes, there would be no place as economical to go. The rents are so cheap because many buildings have been owned by the same families for a number of years. They don't have cost of living increases worked in each year. If they're meeting expenses, everything's okay.
>
> I realize that this neighborhood has the potential to attract people of somewhat higher economic backgrounds, which is fine as long as it doesn't displace our residents.

The above quotation is taken from an interview with Father Hillenbrand in a Chicago weekly, the *Reader*, by Bruce Wexler who observed:

> Perhaps the most important reason for the preservation of the neighborhood is that it is eminently livable. The crime rate is relatively low, transportation is good and as Father John says: People spend a lot of time here living on the street. Most of the people don't own cars. You can do pretty well here on foot. It's not like Arlington Heights [a Chicago suburb] where you need a car to get to the Jewel [supermarket] for a quart of milk. On a nice day it takes me a half hour to get from one block to the next. Everybody is out on their steps, drinking beer, listening to the radio, kids playing. (June 18, 1976)

Not only was East Humboldt Park the product of familiar urban dynamics, but it also received unexpected help from outside, from those draftsmen working downtown on the *Chicago 21* plan. Only an outsider would have dared take the risk of re-naming and redefining the community. Under the name of East Humboldt Park, the changing community had found potentially influential friends in the Chicago Central Area Committee. For the Committee's *Chicago 21* plan argued that "East Humboldt Park provides the framework for revitalization of this neighborhood."

Challenging the Downtown Businessmen

Early in 1974, after the *Chicago 21* plan had been released, representatives of the four residential communities which were incorporated in the *Chicago 21* plan began to meet regularly on Saturday mornings to plan strategy, prepare demands for the Chicago Central Area Committee, and seek television and newspaper publicity. They tried to take the fullest possible advantage of the unexpected opportunity to plan for themselves which downtown businessmen had unintentionally handed to the neighborhoods.

Milton M. Cohen, executive director of the Jewish Council on Urban Affairs (JCUA), said that the *Chicago 21* plan precipitated an instinctive reaction among residents, enflamed the fears of urban renewal and uncovered neighborhood leadership. That could very well have been the case. But it is also true that the JCUA and the Citizen's Information Service, two city-wide organizations with strong links to local communities, helped organize and focus the protest — with help from NCO staff. In its quarterly newsletter (Summer 1974), the JCUA, in an article headlined "We Shall Not Be Moved" claimed that:

> History may be about to repeat itself. Yet another area of Chicago communities seems destined to be priced out of the range of the people who now call it home. When the *Chicago 21* plan to revitalize the downtown business district was originally unveiled in 1973 by the Chicago Central Area Committee — a group of downtown businessmen — and the City Department of Development and Planning, it called for involvement and cooperation with the communities which would be affected by its proposal . . . .
>
> But the communities were not included in the planning phases, and they're angry about it. They've come together to form the Coalition of Central Area Communities because they fear that their lower-income Black, Latino and Italian residents will be urban renewed and priced out of their neighborhoods . . . .
>
> With the help of JCUA, the Coalition of Central Area Communities organized three public meetings at which 1,200 community members applied pressure . . . to the Chicago Central Area Committee for community input into the plan. The results are impressive: The Chicago Central Area Committee has made a matching grant of $50,000 ($12,500 per community) with which to draw up plans which could avert a

> massive displacement of current residents . . . . This is indeed a victory . . . in the fight for self-determination of each of the communities involved.

What the Central Area Committee did not fully realize, when it announced the *Chicago 21* plan, was the extent to which any kind of "plan" had already become a four-letter word among the elders of inner city neighborhoods. Almost instinctively, the elders saw the plan as a design upon *my* neighborhood and *my* home. No matter how carefully or emphatically the planners had tried to safeguard each residential community in the *Chicago 21* plan, they were still burdened with one overwhelming disadvantage: many neighborhood leaders looked upon any outside planner as their natural enemy, and thus were quick to take the *Chicago 21* plan as a declaration of war. They moved speedily to organize themselves — or let themselves be organized — to defend their native land against those who were seen as unjust aggressors.

This time, however, there was a difference. As an independent candidate for political office pointed out in biased language, "The enemies were no longer the sultans of City Hall and its harem of urban planners." Instead, they were the downtown captains of commerce and finance: the big bankers, the downtown merchants, and the leading businessmen who had financed, guided and sponsored the *Chicago 21* plan. As the Chicago Central Area Committee moved to implement its own priorities in the *Chicago 21* plan, it also assumed the responsibility for dealing directly with the residents of the *Chicago 21* communities. Now it was the businessmen who had to become the circuit riders through the neighborhoods that ringed the Loop. At every stop they had to explain to each residential neighborhood, time and again, that their plan did indeed recommend stabilization and rehabilitation, not clearance and relocation of residents for communities such as East Humboldt Park.

That was only the beginning. When the *Chicago 21* planners sliced off the eastern portion of the city's Northwest Development Area and attached it to the *Chicago 21* area, they unwittingly resuscitated the vanishing bugaboo of urban renewal. This was especially true in the East Humboldt Park area where the Noble Square Project was still looked upon as a clear and present danger to the stability of the community. The churches and fraternal groups had relied on their community organization to protect them against any further encroachment from "urban renewal." Rightly or wrongly, urban renewal had become, for these groups, a dirty word. That is why the highly partisan spokesman for the Coalition of Central Area Communities (East Humboldt Park was one of the four communities) early in 1974 cried out:

> We know the history of what development means in the City of Chicago. For us Urban Renewal means Urban Removal. But we intend to stay where we are now, and if the *Chicago 21* plan is to become a reality, we will have to be acknowledged as a legitimate and permanent element of the city. We will not be ignored . . . . The businessmen and the City of

> Chicago have put together a plan for 200,000 residents without consulting any of those residents. Non-residents, businessmen with primarily economic interests, have dictated what the future holds for us.

Later in 1975, even after the basic agreement had been worked out with the Chicago Central Area Committee to fund East Humboldt Park's own planning, a bulletin distributed to the parishioners of St. Boniface Church again dredged up old fears to capture their support:

> How can we be sure we won't be bulldozed out? What can we do to keep our houses? Back in the 1960's Urban Renewal was a serious threat to our community. Because of the value of our land, our closeness to the downtown area, and our local shopping facilities, the City made plans for the Community which included tearing down buildings and putting up new ones: there was no guarantee that those people whose homes would be wrecked would be able to afford the new housing. Also, the people had seen how Urban Renewal had affected other parts of the City — moving out the poorer people, demolishing their homes, then constructing new housing which only the rich could afford. The poor were forced to move to other deteriorating areas to repeat the process again and again.
>
> Our people were getting smarter as they saw how the Kennedy Expressway caused the eviction of hundreds of families, most of them Polish. We saw how the University of Illinois, Chicago Circle Campus almost destroyed the old Italian community on the near west side. We saw older homes torn down on the near north side to make way for expensive condominiums and apartments. We were being educated! When it seemed to be our turn, our people said NO! We will not leave the neighborhood we love. Since then we have been successful at resisting the advances of the City and the investors.

What had happened in 1974 and 1975 was described quite accurately by East Humboldt Park leaders in a special memorandum sent to Mayor Richard J. Daley to explain how the community came to be involved in planning:

> The *Chicago 21* plan was published with the primary objective of preserving and maintaining the central Loop business district . . . . The boundaries of the *21* plan included several older neighborhoods surrounding the Loop area, including East Humboldt Park. The recognition that healthy business communities are part and parcel of healthy neighborhoods was an underlying theme of the overall *21* plan.
>
> Early in 1974, residents of the East Humboldt Park area began to ask, "What does the *Chicago 21* plan mean for us?" No specific plans existed for this residential portion of the *21* area and, understandably, many people were concerned about being displaced by new development. After several meetings, the central Loop businessmen, under the auspices of the Chicago Central Area Committee, agreed to assist East Humboldt Park to do its own planning. The CCAC pledged up to $12,500 in matching money to this community (as well as others) so that the community could have a professional planning firm beginning in November 1975.

The Search For A Planner

In April 1975 the East Humboldt Park Committee set out to hire the planning consultant who would, in the months to come, work with the community in drafting a realistic, workable program to improve the area. They had already raised $12,500 through local businesses, foundations and special community-sponsored dances, raffles and bazaars, and had received the Chicago Central Area Committee's matching grant. Who would the planner be? In the light of the earlier hand-to-hand combat with "city planners" over many years, would anyone be found who might be acceptable to the community? Was there any private planning firm, in Chicago or elsewhere in the United States, which could plan rationally in such a jittery setting and also cope with the history of bitter opposition to downtown planning?

The bidding was open and public. Invitations were sent out widely. Twelve established planning firms indicated that they were ready, willing and able to undertake the planning job. After a series of lengthy meetings, the original list was narrowed to three. Then at a four-hour meeting in the summer of 1975, attended by several hundred residents, a vote was taken, and the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs (NCUEA) of Washington, D.C. was awarded a seven-month contract. Not only was the Chicago planning establishment puzzled, some were also upset by the choice. Didn't they have it "in the bag?" Wouldn't "one of their own" get the contract? One city planner summed up the reaction in these words:

> Some planners immediately began to bad-mouth the NCUEA. In the first place, they didn't know who or what the National Center was. NCUEA didn't belong to the planner's club, locally or nationally. If NCUEA was not part of the planning establishment, what could it possibly offer by way of planning expertise? A disgruntled few even hinted that the bidding and final vote must have been rigged.

The inability to comprehend what had happened even seeped into the mass media. In reporting on East Humboldt Park's decision, a *Chicago Tribune* writer (January 8, 1976) used invidious language:

> The Northwest Community Organization hired the NCUEA in Washington to conduct its neighborhood study. The Pilsen Neighbors (another *Chicago 21* community) meanwhile hired a *professional* planner for their study. (*Italics supplied.*)

Why then was the National Center awarded the planning contract? In retracing the steps that led to the community's final approval, the decision was not as outlandish or surprising as some had made it appear.

While the NCUEA may have been a stranger to local planning professionals, it was not a stranger at the NCO gates. Monsignor Geno Baroni, national president of the NCUEA, had been the keynote speaker at NCO's Annual Congress in 1971. Later, NCUEA officials had come to Chicago at the invitation of leaders in the Polish community to share ideas on how the Avondale area, located three miles to the northwest along the

Milwaukee Avenue diagonal, might be improved, its commercial strip upgraded, and adjoining neighborhoods revitalized. NCO leaders were parties to these discussions, and NCUEA professionals were attuned to the volatile sensibilities of these neighborhoods.

With its own concern for the future of urban neighborhoods and with its public record as an advocate of ethnic communities, the NCUEA was able to talk the language of residents worried about the future of their homes, their small stores, their churches and their neighborhood.

NCUEA representatives pledged that they would not parachute into the neighborhood and retreat as soon as the money ran out. They convinced the residents that NCUEA had a continuing commitment to East Humboldt Park. They were shrewd enough not to talk about a "plan for the neighborhood" but to offer, instead, technical planning assistance to the community's leaders. By not offering to do their plan for them, NCUEA avoided being drawn into the in-fighting in the community over the wisdom of bringing in an outside planner. Furthermore, NCUEA was willing to work with the two NCO organizers assigned to the East Humboldt Park area, who would help harvest the residents' views of what should be done in the community.

Finally, NCUEA had an ace up its sleeves in Marcy Kaptur, a 29-year old planning professional who had six years of experience with the Toledo-Lucas County Plan Commission in Ohio. Her experience with neighborhood planning stressed intensive community involvement in the plan-making process. Her professional credentials were impressive. Kaptur had a master's degree in urban planning from the University of Michigan and had studied new towns and urban renewal at the University of Manchester in Great Britain. She also held memberships in the American Institute of Planners and the American Society of Planning Officials. It was she who was assigned to work with the East Humboldt Park residents.

The back-biting and sniping among the perplexed Chicago professionals began to disappear as East Humboldt Park's planning moved ahead. The fact that only two of the four *Chicago 21* neighborhoods had been able to rustle up enough cash to hire a consultant increased the planning community's respect for the East Humboldt Park area. Finally, NCUEA was singled out as an outfit to watch because it actually had been meeting East Humboldt Park's planning deadlines while Pilsen Neighbors, the other *Chicago 21* community which had employed a "professional planner" six months earlier, had yet to produce a plan.

4

Part vs. Whole

It follows, we think, that the measuring rod of national growth should be the quality of our neighborhoods, and the assurance that neighborhoods – even when they change – will not deteriorate. The neighborhood should be America's growth unit.—National Policy Task Force of the American Institute of Architects, 1972

East Humboldt Park: Its Emerging Identity

G.K. Chesterton once said that while we choose our friends, God gives us our neighbors. Nobody knew the wisdom of this better than East Humboldt Park residents who, without their knowledge, had had *their* neighborhood defined for them by downtown planners and who had spent nearly eighteen months striving toward the day when they would have the funds to do their own neighborhood planning. Prior to November 1975, when work actually began on "a comprehensive development plan for our area,"* East Humboldt Park residents did not have:

1) a recognized organization of their own;
2) agreement on a name for their area (Can anyone imagine a real community without a name?);
3) an office of their own;
4) a clear strategy for neighborhood planning; or
5) a sense of what they would do with their neighborhood plan, once it was completed.

Up to this point a committee of East Humboldt Park residents, with vaguely defined authority, had done all the work. Under the informal, low-keyed leadership of Father Hillenbrand, better known as "Father

*These were the actual words used by East Humboldt Park residents to describe the planning they were about to undertake.

John" from St. Boniface Church, the members of that committee had left behind a record of accomplishments which, at times, even they could not believe.

They had represented their area in the Coalition of Central Area Communities, negotiated successfully with the Chicago Central Area Committee, raised more than $25,000, sponsored public meetings, involved hundreds of local residents, chosen the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs as their planning consultant, and would now be overseeing the day to day activities of Marcy Kaptur, the NCUEA's professional planner. They were self-conscious about their emerging identity and growing solidarity — proud of their accomplishments. They had shouldered a lion's share of responsibility. But, strictly speaking, they had little official standing and no legal status.

As the umbrella organization, NCO claimed to represent 160,000 Chicago residents in the six-square-mile area which encompassed the smaller East Humboldt Park community which was less than a square mile in size and housed a population of 20,000. In order to adapt to the changing priorities of the East Humboldt Park group, NCO acted as the legally incorporated, not-for-profit organization authorized to receive and dispense funds. NCO staff which had been working in the East Humboldt Park area continued their work, cooperating closely with the community and its planner. This staff no longer operated out of the NCO office (coincidentally located inside the East Humboldt Park area's own boundaries) but instead moved to the new Community 21-East Humboldt Park offices at 1400 West Chestnut.

For years NCO had divided its urban domain into smaller geographical areas, each of which had its own civic organization (a "civic" in NCO parlance) and its own organizer. Within East Humboldt Park's boundaries there were functioning, by this time, four NCO-affiliated "civics": St. Stan's, St. Boniface, COPA (Conservation of Property Association, a group that predated NCO) and the eastern portion of the Industrial Council of the Northwest Community which had an office, staff and an active, well-organized board of its own. Thus East Humboldt Park residents found themselves already organized, as it were, from above, by the NCO and from below, by the four "civics." Striving for an entity and an identity of its own, East Humboldt Park's leadership found itself sandwiched between two existing levels of community organization. One resident summed up the problem in these words:

> We originally baked NCO as a two-layered cake. Now we're trying to make room for a third layer, not on the top or the bottom but smack in the middle. There's no cookbook around to tell us how to do it.

How would NCO, an established community organization with a colorful history and a national reputation, accommodate itself to an upstart within its boundaries, however friendly and cooperative? How would the parent body react to one of its offspring suddenly becoming newsworthy, attracting financial support equal to about half of NCO's own budget, and

capturing recognition from the city's leadership? In the galaxy of NCO "civics", a bright star had appeared; it threatened to outshine the galaxy itself. To mix the metaphors for a moment, on the NCO stage a minor act was being given, it seemed, top billing.

From the beginning the East Humboldt Park group was not a totally independent organization. Its NCO lineage and connections saddled it with the traditional roles of smaller affiliates. But NCO had never before experienced such a sudden surge of notoriety, financial backing, and local interest for one of its constituent parts. Indeed, the part seemed to be becoming too big for the whole. The spontaneous combustion of neighborhood nationalism among East Humboldt Park neighbors was unprecedented. Obviously, something new was afoot in the area east of Ashland Avenue.

During the past decade NCO had spun off several organizations as a result of its programs. These organizations, however, had a single purpose and did not represent the many-sided interests of a typical neighborhood organization. Each of these NCO "spin-offs" had its specific function, its separate board of directors, and its own not-for-profit charter. The Bickerdike Redevelopment Corporation, for example, builds new housing, rehabilitates older residences and offers counseling to home-owners and potential home-buyers. The Northwest Employment Development Corporation finds jobs for local residents, sponsors work training programs, and gives English classes to Latino workers who have the skills but not the language capability that a job might demand. The Industrial Council of the Northwest represents 250 companies located in NCO's southern tier. The Council's purpose is to upgrade this industrial corridor, attract new manufacturing firms and provide employment for local residents.

The emergence of these special-purpose organizations, however, did not represent any potential for carving away a piece of NCO's turf. While they set precedents for local initiative and independence, they were not community organizations in the traditional sense. Each, in its special way, bolstered the broader objectives of NCO without having to use the tactics of head-on confrontation and public demonstrations.

But what was NCO to do with its East Humboldt Park fledgling? Would it eventually leave the NCO nest? Would East Humboldt Park's activity ultimately overshadow NCO? On the other hand, was it possible to re-allocate roles and responsibilities and yet not disconnect East Humboldt Park from NCO? Or would continued control by NCO be so heavy-handed as to brake East Humboldt Park's potential for community development? Would East Humboldt Park's unique needs and successful initiatives be shortchanged in NCO's constant struggle to satisfy the larger and competing demands of its many affiliates? Would the East Humboldt Park *part* — its financial support, new alliances, and freshly garnered respect — be diluted in the NCO *whole* which had extensive

priorities, long-standing commitments, and an insatiable appetite for one victory after another?

In November 1975, with NCO's blessing, the East Humboldt Park residents began baking their three-layered cake without a well-tried recipe to follow. NCO staff and leadership closely watched the planning and organizational process, wondering how it would all turn out.

The Strategy Behind the Planning

While East Humboldt Park's citizenry may have gone into the 1975-76 planning period without an organization of their own, they did have several things going for them. First, they had a local committee which had worked together several nights a week for nearly eighteen months. It was informally headed by Father John who tried to stay in the background, unsuccessfully, it might be said. He was even reluctant to identify himself as the committee's chairman. He sought anonymity for his leadership role, seeking instead to build up the committee by playing down his own initiative and active role.

Secondly, Father John was solidly committed to NCO and had earned the trust and confidence of its lay leadership and full-time staff. Since he was equally dedicated to the success of East Humboldt Park's planning, he was thrust into the role of a "double agent," in the best sense of that term, making sure that the whole and part stayed together to give one another mutual support. As a mediator he was an undeniable success. Thirdly, the hard core of his original committee came from St. Boniface Church which was strategically located in the vital center of the East Humboldt Park area. It was thus easier for the committee to expand in all directions to involve other institutions and organizations. Finally, it was becoming increasingly evident that as the membership of the committee was broadened, only Father John's schedule was flexible enough to respond to the ever-increasing demands upon the planning committee to follow up its decisions. He gradually assumed the mantle of leadership.

With Father John emerging as spokesman and chairman of the East Humboldt Park planning committee, an overall planning strategy to finish the comprehensive redevelopment program for the community was agreed upon. In challenging some established principles of community planning, East Humboldt Park's leaders did not show up empty-handed. With guidance from Marcy Kaptur, the consulting planner, they came up with a set of specific steps to reach a community-wide consensus:

- For planning purposes, East Humboldt Park's mile-square area would be split into eight sub-areas or neighborhoods. Specific ratings as to the extent of neighborhood deterioration and the need for improvement, as well as recommendations for action, would be given for each sub-area. The fundamental premise of the planning was that "the neighborhood unit is the basic building block of city planning."

- Six working sub-committees would be set up to enlist the community in the planning enterprise: (1) housing, (2) business and industry, (3) sidewalks, alleys and city services, (4) crime prevention and control, (5) education and (6) communications. (The last two committees never really succeeded in putting themselves or their agendas together.)
- As planning director, Kaptur would assist the six committees as they undertook field surveys and polled residents for their views as to what might be done to better the conditions of each of the community's 245 blocks and the score of cul-de-sacs.
- A new office — just for East Humboldt Park — would be opened.
- An NCO organizer, Rainer Baake, would continue working full-time to help generate maximum feasible participation among residents. He would collect responses to questionnaires, recruit attendance at meetings and keep open the channels of communication. A second organizer, working part-time, was to involve more of the Latino residents who, despite their numbers, had not been in the forefront of East Humboldt Park activities, as had other ethnic and racial groups. (The organizers would also be around to make sure that East Humboldt Park's multiplying leadership would not wander off the NCO reservation.)
- The community planning process would last eight months, concluding in the summer of 1976.
- Since the area was primarily an older residential community, the planning would result in a program for community improvement to be staged over a three-year period. The emphasis would be on physical planning and improved housekeeping, as opposed to raising issues of social policy and doing actual social planning.
- As the chief author, Kaptur would take the overall responsibility for integrating the community objectives and neighborhood priorities, as assembled by the six sub-committees, into the final plan.

Carrying Out the Planning Process

It must be remembered that for a decade and a half, it was East Humboldt Park that had received most of the Department of Urban Renewal's attention. Here was where the urban renewal "intrusion" had taken place and where, as far as the residents were concerned, the battles, now and in the future, would have to be fought. If there is a neighborhood in Chicago where "urban renewal," no matter how one characterizes it, is more feared or hated, that neighborhood has yet to be found.

Meanwhile, the members of East Humboldt Park's planning committee were busily at work. As a first step they distributed, door to door, an "Upgrading Questionnaire" in English, Spanish and Polish versions, designed to elicit residents' concerns and local priorities. During the bitterly cold months of December and January, volunteers canvassed thousands of property owners and renters for their views on the future of the area. To circumvent any unexpected surge of hostility, the East

Humboldt Park committee once again had to defend its planning activities. The preface to the "Upgrading Questionnaire" carried this urgent explanation:

> This is not an urban renewal project. The primary concern is repairing older buildings and constructing new homes on vacant lots.

The East Humboldt Park planning committee was soon to be hit by a boomerang. A six-column banner headline, "Neighborhoods get voice in city's plan," appeared in the *Chicago Tribune* in January, 1976. Overnight consternation resulted, even though there was nothing revealing or sensational in the article. It simply described the planning which the East Humboldt Park leadership was setting out to do for the neighborhrhood. But having been schooled for fifteen years to distrust all city planning and to react, Pavlov-like, at the sound of "urban renewal," residents refused to take the news article at face value. Instead they tried to read between the lines, and some of them concluded that they had been sold out by "one of our own." To them, it seemed that urban renewal was finally going to slip into their neighborhood through a side door which had not been securely bolted.

Fortunately, the neighborhood planning process enabled East Humboldt Park's planning committee to reassure residents, face-to-face, that this latest community planning had no connection with "urban renewal" and was, as claimed, a home-bred program. A month after the distribution of the "Upgrading Questionnaire," NCO's 14th Annual Congress not only endorsed East Humboldt Park's planning but also acknowledged the presence of this underground suspicion. The Congress called upon the East Humboldt Park area to "come up with a comprehensive development plan . . . to assure the people of our community of their right to live without being displaced by urban renewal or any other sort of development."

A Name of Their Own

A neighborhood is a state of mind as well as a designated piece of urban terrain. How then did the residents finally give themselves a name which they could call their own? It was neither an orderly nor a parliamentary sequence. Over a two-year period, various names casually shifted back and forth, as spokesmen for downtown, the mass media, NCO and the residents themselves all sought to entitle this piece of Chicago geography. In looking back now and trying to trace what really happened, one would have to follow an uncharted trail into a community's subconscious self. But a student of Shakespeare might hazard a guess that residents went through "seven ages" trying to agree on a name, not all staged in any progressive or climactic order:

1) "East Humboldt Park," the name assigned the area by *Chicago 21* planners;

2) "Northwest Community Organization area," the label given by

newspapers to this older residential section in the *Chicago 21* plan;

3) "NCO's Chicago 21 Committee," the title of the group which officially negotiated with the downtown business leaders for a matching grant;

4) "NCO's East-of-Ashland area," as it was called when NCO tried to assert its leadership on behalf of the area;

5) "Community 21 Committee," the label that galvanized the attention of neighborhood leaders as they began to see the importance of making sure that *their* plan would eventually gain the same public support which the *Chicago 21* plan now enjoyed;

6) "Community 21-East of Ashland," as further efforts were made to keep the *Chicago 21* connection and tie it to an actual physical place; and finally

7) "Community 21-East Humboldt Park," the name that finally won out early in 1976.

With a consensus on its name, Community 21-East Humboldt Park opened a centrally located, storefront office across the street from St. Boniface Church. Its new name was quickly stenciled on the window and printed on new stationery:

COMMUNITY 21
East Humboldt Park
1400 W. Chestnut Street - Chicago, Illinois 60622

Furnishing the office became a community event. The furniture, including a drafting chair, was donated. The coffee pot came from a lady living in a senior citizens' high-rise across the street. At a generous discount, rugs arrived from a local store. Flags quickly appeared and were hung up: Polish, Italian, Mexican, Puerto Rican and American. School children played on the sidewalk in front of the office and on its steps, dropping messages in the mail slot. While residents did the cleaning, NCO staff helped with the painting. One of the clean-up men said:

> All planning meetings were held in the office. The East Humboldt Park storefront was clean and bright. It looked like a neighborhood improvement, as opposed to the NCO office which was untidy, dusty, overcrowded, noisy, cluttered. Over the seven month period, NCO began to tidy up its own officce — just a bit.

East Humboldt Park, which now had an office distinct from that of NCO, began generating its own publicity, and sent out meeting notices

on its own letterhead. But the new name was more than a paper matter. During 1976 East Humboldt Park's leadership was also in direct negotiations with the Chicago Central Area Committee, the Department of Development and Planning, and other public agencies. Thus, during the eight months of planning, the outline of a future organization began to appear, as did a new series of questions.

Coming Under the Chicago 21 Umbrella

If the purpose of the planning was to come up with a plan, what eventually would be done with the finished product? How would it be used to speed up community improvement and development? Who would be responsible for its implementation? Such questions were, by and large, relegated to the final days of the planning process, the early days of the summer of 1976. But there was one exception.

From the very beginning, a long-term strategy was not only agreed upon but also put into motion promptly: East Humboldt Park's leaders would strive to have their finished plan incorporated into the *Chicago 21* plan itself. The community's own plan, it was hoped, would then receive the quasi-official status being accorded to the *Chicago 21* plan by city officials, by downtown business leaders, and by federal agencies. If the community's plan did receive such an endorsement, then residents felt they would gain a direct voice in determining the future of their community and would exile, once and for all, the spectre of "urban renewal" from their midst. They could make certain, they were convinced, that large-scale demolition of their residences could be prevented.

To this end East Humboldt Park leaders immediately began laying the groundwork to have their finished product publicly endorsed by the Chicago Central Area Committee, the city's Department of Development and Planning, and the Mayor. The first page of the final plan prepared by and for East Humboldt Park, example, seeks to acknowledge that such a commitment had in fact been given:

> The Community 21 plan follows on and becomes a part of the earlier publication of the *Chicago 21* Plan (September 1973) . . . .

While some residents feared their home-grown leaders might be bewitched by the establishment downtown, they showed little hesitancy to undertake a little co-opting of their own.

Conflict and Compromise

Beginning in November 1975, the eight month journey that produced a program for community improvement was not without its detours, unmarked crossroads and unexpected delays. Some of the uncertainties were quickly and easily resolved. For example, at the peak of East Humboldt Park's planning, NCO leaders had launched a highly-organized, well-publicized campaign against a rate increase sought by the Peoples

Gas Light and Coke Company from the Illinois Commerce Commission. At one meeting, when these activities were making front-page headlines, a worried resident asked whether the picketing, sit-ins and street protests would jeopardize East Humboldt Park's planning arrangements with the Chicago Central Area Committee. Wasn't one of its most influential members an official of the Gas Company? The matter was dropped when Father John gave this answer:

> The NCO opposition to a gas hike is a positive action on behalf of our neighbors. In the East Humboldt Park area we didn't give away our right to stand up, to be seen, to speak out, to let everybody know. We never agreed to keep silent; we only agreed to plan and work together.

Another potential conflict was averted in 1975, months before the neighborhood planning was actually begun, setting an important precedent with regard to East Humboldt Park's independence and range of authority. Who was to hire the outside planner to work with the East Humboldt Park residents? The question was resolved when it was agreed that the East Humboldt Park citizenry would select the planning consultant while NCO would be the legal employer. Since East Humboldt Park's leadership was not a legal entity and did not have facilities for handling money, writing checks or keeping financial records, and NCO did, the arrangement was mutually satisfactory.

The compromise reflected the principle of subsidiarity, which, happily for all concerned, would guide future relations: East Humboldt Park was to be responsible for all activities within its boundaries except those which could be legally or technically handled only by NCO itself.

An accommodation on other points of contention was not to be arrived at so smoothly. As a matter of fact, some issues remain unresolved. As a highly-activist community organization, flitting from one confrontation to the next, NCO had, during its lifetime, given little attention to planning — except in self-defense. In its head-on collision with the Department of Urban Renewal in the late 1960's, NCO had adopted a *People's Conservation Plan*, demanding DUR's surrender of neighborhood planning to NCO. Now almost a decade later, the development of a local neighborhood plan had become an important, well-publicized objective in one sector of the six square mile area for which NCO claimed to speak. But NCO's various "civics" were beginning to feel slighted and worried that they would be shortchanged in any forthcoming distribution of public resources. The media attention directed to East Humboldt Park's activities, however, was not the only reason that the "civics" had become more and more apprehensive.

While East Humboldt Park was busy with its neighborhood planning, a new force, in the form of the federal government, entered the picture. For in 1975 and 1976, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development had allocated $90 million of Community Development funds to the City of Chicago. Community groups and local institutions were invited to submit proposals for neighborhood improvement to the city. To no one's

surprise the city was inundated with proposals whose total cost would far exceed the funds available from HUD. One estimate was $500,000,000. Thus the city was compelled to pick and choose from among hundreds of proposals and to establish priorities for its distribution of limited resources. The Department of Development and Planning had designated twenty-one smaller "community development planning areas" throughout the city, three of which were located behind the invisible "Maginot line" which NCO had erected to halt any further "invasion by urban renewal." None of these smaller planning areas was actually in East Humboldt Park itself. To obtain Community Development funded improvements there had to be neighborhood planning.

NCO had never intended that its line of defense would exclude physical improvements to streets, curbs, sidewalks, sewers and parks or would prevent the rehabilitation of existing housing — all activities which were legitimate uses of Community Development monies. Thus, as the news of these happenings — in Chicago's City Hall and on Washington's Capitol Hill — spread throughout the community, NCO officials, especially the staff, began to feel the pressure. Should they go along with a basic shift in organizational tactics? The NCO staff was certainly not planning oriented, nor trained in the art. By and large, they disdained long-term goals for community improvement. Their real aim was to give residents a political education, to heighten political involvement. They were more dedicated to short-range targets and immediate victories: fixing the site of a new school, preventing the expansion of a parking lot, or removing a dead elm or an abandoned house. As far as the staff was concerned, planning seldom produced the dramatic victories which gave life blood to a community. Planning tended to delay action and hence was regarded as heresy by NCO organizers who were addicted to direct action. NCO old-timers, some of whom had been around when NCO was founded in 1962, expressed sympathy with the organizers' reluctance to become entangled in the planning process.

NCO's Changing Tactics

Yet during 1975 and 1976 the NCO establishment found that it had to change some of its ways if it was to qualify for neighborhood improvements financed by Community Development funds. The staff were the first to experience the shift in policy. While NCO organizer Rainer Baake was aiding Marcy Kaptur and the East Humboldt Park residents in the production of their neighborhood plan, other organizers were asked to help "civics" in adjoining NCO areas hatch more modest neighborhood plans. These, too, would identify local projects which could be financed by Community Development funds. For several years the *Peoples Conservation Plan* had been shelved, almost forgotten, with NCO doing little or nothing to implement it. When the federal Community Development grant arrived in Chicago and some neighborhood planning seemed to be required, NCO staff hurriedly located a copy of their earlier plan, dusted

it off, and began using it to guide the "civics" in the search for worthwhile civic projects which the city might be willing to fund.

NCO's leadership was painfully aware that if its staff were not given this part-time assignment, a "civic" might go ahead and plan on its own, submitting its own improvement proposals to the city and thus shattering NCO's united front before the city. East Humboldt Park had already submitted to the Mayor its own proposals for the expenditure of the city's Community Development funds. One "civic" had also taken such a step and met with the local alderman who then arranged a meeting with Lewis W. Hill, the City's Commissioner, not only of Development and Planning but also of Urban Renewal. They discussed Community Development projects for their area, and Hill assigned one of his planners to work with the "civic's" leadership. A self-starting "civic" thus posed a threat to NCO's unbending insistence that it was the sole spokesman for the entire community. Subsequently, in the summer of 1976, when Community Development projects had been identified in six sections of NCO, it set up a formal meeting with Commissioner Hill to present, not one overall proposal, but six separate packages, including the one from East Humboldt Park, and to demand that the city implement all of them at once. It is doubtful whether this umbrella-like presentation helped advance the specific proposals sought by the various "civics" or the carefully framed projects submitted by East Humboldt Park's residents. It was clear that East Humboldt Park was being forced to carry the burdens of NCO's previous history with the city.

As the months sped through 1976, it became clearer that some NCO "civics" were giving neighborhood planning and development a higher priority than were the NCO staff. The organizers were having a difficult time "kicking" their confrontation habit as they were forced to respond to the individual planning needs of each "civic." The leadership of the local "civics" (outside of East Humboldt Park) was absorbed by such questions as: (1) Does the presence of a full-time planner in East Humboldt Park and the publication of a professionally-prepared plan put the other "civics" at a disadvantage in competing for outside resources? (2) Without a planner of their own, will they fall behind in community improvement? (3) Does East Humboldt Park, as a result of its negotiations with downtown business leaders, now have an inside track to get earlier funding for its Community Development projects than other groups on the near northwest side?

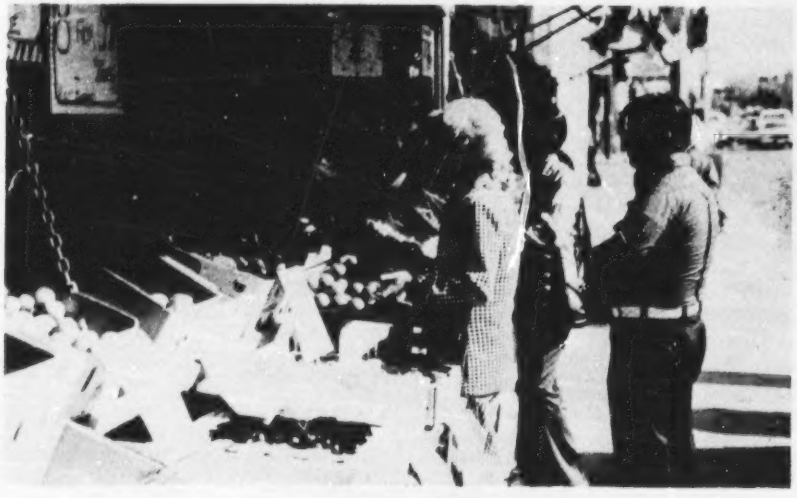
During 1975 and 1976, the "civics" also questioned whether NCO resources were being fairly divided among all sections. When it was explained that no additional NCO funds or resources were being poured into East Humboldt Park and that the salary of the professional planner, the office rent, various planning expenses, and other costs were being paid out of the money raised by and for East Humboldt Park neighbors, the questioning subsided. But the underlying puzzlement among the "civics" persisted: Why couldn't we accomplish what East Humboldt

Park was able to do and why doesn't NCO help us to do it?

Strength in Smallness

Unwittingly, the organizing and planning activities of East Humboldt Park residents had exposed a weakness in the "organization of organizations" of which the Northwest Community Organization was a prototype. As a sprawling, loosely knit coalition of local churches, block clubs, hospitals and social agencies, NCO usually had to seek out broad, community-wide issues which had a mass appeal. In the inner city, however, there is a desperate need for sturdier institutions and organizations which serve a smaller area and which can deal more personally with the individual anxieties of renters and homeowners. These are the nitty-gritty problems of repairing a dangerous sidewalk, patrolling an intersection hazardous for school age children, seeding lawns and planting shrubbery, touching up fences and porches, ensuring safe streets, and building pride in a block. The social art of "neighboring" requires the care and patience a gardener has to devote to a bed of flowers.

The umbrella-type community organization attempts to represent a territory so large that only rarely can it afford enough staff to give the personal attention which some low-income family, whether tenant or owner, may require. Herein lay the hidden strength of NCO's smaller "civics" and the church or settlement house which has ordinarily been associated with each of them. It is one thing for a citizen to be concerned about the removal of an abandoned, gutted building located two miles away in another corner of NCO. It is quite another matter for such a



Open air fruit market on Ashland Avenue

dangerous eyesore to be situated next door or along the way to the local grocery store — an attractive nuisance for children of all ages.

The spotlight of public attention given to East Humboldt Park's search for neighborhood, its closeness to hundreds of families, its personal interest in the ordinary concerns that bother fathers and mothers, and its ability to react immediately to a pressing problem had unintended consequences in the extended NCO family. Not only was the human quest for a neighborhood reawakened among East Humboldt Park residents but other sections of the near northwest side were also reminded that neighborhoods were still viable in a metropolis. They are even more vital in the inner city which is inhabited by low-income families with children, their grandparents close by. For such families, neighborhoods are not urban antiques or museum pieces to be visited or admired from a seat in a chartered bus and finally to be preserved as urban landmarks. A family with children, especially an upwardly-mobile one still at the lower rungs of the economic ladder, thrives in such a big-city neighborhood; without it some families would not survive. Urban neighborhoods, most would agree, have had a past. The question is, which ones will be allowed to have a future?

How will NCO see East Humboldt Park's search for a community? As a threat? An opportunity? Or will NCO take a third option and ignore East Humboldt Park's quest, an option that might prove even more damaging than open opposition? For inertia is the greatest enemy of all, insuring that things will continue as they were and that nothing new will happen. Perhaps the choice has already been made, as the following anecdote hints.

The residents of East Humboldt Park — the label given them by outsiders — chose "Community 21-East Humboldt Park" as their name. They wanted their own identity. When Marcy Kaptur or one of the East Humboldt Park residents answered the telephone at the new office, their first words were always "Community 21." When Rainer Baake, the NCO organizer picked up the telephone during the first months of the planning process, he would say, "NCO." Later, he would answer, "NCO-Community 21." Is this instance a straw in the wind, an indicator that NCO may never be the same again? For the longing for neighborhood now animates the people of East Humboldt Park, and no one can predict what is likely to ensue.

5

Attract and Retain

Thine alabaster cities gleam undimmed by human tears.—From America the Beautiful *by Katherine Lee Bates*

The sliver of a triangle where Milwaukee, Ashland and Division Streets intersect symbolizes the neighborhood transition taking place as Polonia gives way to a new generation. The triangle is cluttered, poorly maintained and badly landscaped. Surviving grass is a stubble; the benches are blistered and grimy. In the daytime, senior citizens venture forth to feed the pigeons whose droppings add to the unattractiveness. At night the scavengers appear, scurrying rats who devour crumbs which fat pigeons scorned in the daylight. An eyesore visible from six different directions, the triangle is not only a symptom of the urban disease which infects the community, but also a sign of the confusion that upsets local leaders as they ponder whether the surrounding area has a future.

Future Choices

Early in 1976, in tribute to the ethnic history of the area, the Chicago City Council officially named the place the "Polonia Triangle" and set July 4th as the day of dedication. When the Fourth of July arrived, the ceremony, it was discovered, had been quietly cancelled. Why? It seems that opposition arose from unexpected sources. The professional spokesmen for the city's Poles, mostly middle class and no longer residents of East Humboldt Park, saw the old "Polish Downtown" as a crumbling memorial of the past. They did not want to be reminded of the ethnic enclave which they had left behind or to have any new Polonia Triangle associated with an ailing commercial district and the blight encircling it. Those elderly Poles who still lived in the area and worried about the future were ambivalent. They saw the Polonia Triangle as a simultaneous exercise in tender reminiscence and futility. "What good will it do for the community?" was the whispered question. One way or the other, the prospect of the Polonia Triangle did not excite them.

East Humboldt Park's Latino residents, however, viewed the triangle as an opportunity, not to celebrate the past but to shape and symbolize what the community might eventually become. The triangle lay at the heart of the NCO area and unified its busiest market place. Why should that busy crossroads be chosen to honor the Polish yesteryear, they asked, if most of the future shoppers and neighboring residents will be predominantly Puerto Rican and Mexican? Why not, instead, revamp the triangle to shape a bright *new* future, to be a sign of hope to the Latino generation yet to be born?

Or does the future of East Humboldt Park lie in still another direction? Will it become an intensely urban neighborhood with a multi-lingual and many-hued population? Will newlyweds be attracted by the zest of urban variety, by the challenge of remodelling older houses which would become homes for themselves and their children, by the mixture of old and new, and by the closeness to Chicago's downtown? Until East Humboldt Park projects its future more clearly, the "identity crisis" over the triangle is unlikely to be resolved.

Defying the Inner City Stereotype

By the middle 1970's East Humboldt Park had become typically inner city, an aging, shabby community, its future uncertain and undefined. As in any metropolis, "inner city" describes those older areas which are being steadily and systematically abandoned by the private sector, in the form of for-profit or not-for-profit institutions. Having lost confidence in the viability of an inner city community, businesses, private schools, social agencies, churches and other institutions begin closing their doors to escape to a new location. Upwardly mobile families, whatever their race, ethnicity or religion, follow suit. Leaving their properties behind them, some become absentee landlords. Across store windows, folding iron gates ominously begin to appear — to be locked shut at night to prevent break-ins and burglaries. Nor is this the whole story. Before long the community is served, during working hours, by school teachers, firemen, policemen, social workers, precinct captains and, at times, even ministers, all of whom live elsewhere and are not at hand when emergencies arise at night or on the weekend. To the list of scarce occupations in such a neighborhood add experienced carpenters, plumbers, electricians, painters and pharmacists. These telltale signs are to be found in East Humboldt Park.

The institutional abandonment of East Humboldt Park and its immediate environs did not, of course, begin in the 1970's. The slow and oftentimes stealthy exodus of established private businesses and voluntary institutions began a generation ago. Right after World War II, Weber High School, operated by the Resurrectionist Fathers and situated just off the triangle, was one of the first to go, relocating six miles northwest. A few years later, Lenard's, a Polish restaurant of national reputation lo-

cated at the triangle, moved several blocks northwest to a larger location on Milwaukee Avenue, only to shut down in the 1960's. In 1976 the Polish National Alliance relocated its headquarters, which fronted the triangle, to the city's far northwest side. Wieboldt's, a chain of large department stores, closed down its Milwaukee Avenue branch. And about the same time, Holy Trinity Church phased out its elementary school. Using the same northwest passage, the Illinois Division of the Polish American Congress left its building on Division Street for new offices further up Milwaukee Avenue.

For decades, to celebrate the adoption of Poland's democratic constitution, the annual Polish parade used to march along Division Street and end up at the bronze monument to Thaddeus Kosciuszko in Humboldt Park for speeches and patriotic ceremonies. The *obchod*, as the celebration was called in Polish, was a venerable institution. In some years, it attracted crowds of 100,000 and larger. But in the early 1970's the parade was shifted to State Street downtown. Subsequently, the equestrian statue of Kosciuszko, which had graced the park since 1904, was also removed. The reasons given publicly for the move blamed vandals who had dirtied and scarred the statue's appearance, but more importantly, the huge statue "was located too close to a baseball diamond for the safety of the players." It should be noted that most of the baseball players and their fans were Puerto Ricans. The statue, cleaned up and repaired, will be set up in a park along Lake Michigan, six miles to the southeast of its historic site.

Signs of Hope

Realistically speaking, what is the wellspring of East Humboldt Park's hope? Where does the area's residential and commercial future lie? First, not all of the institutions have run away. The Catholic churches still hold fast, despite the stormy weather. The three Catholic high schools, Holy Trinity, Holy Family and St. Stanislaus Kostka, remain to serve teenagers with fresh accents and a different culture which is Hispanic and Catholic in tradition. Settlement houses, like Erie House, have sunk deep roots in the community, and their programs branch out to serve and involve the latest residents. The headquarters and the famous Polish Museum of the Polish Roman Catholic Union, a nationwide fraternal organization, are still around. Such institutions give the community status. A few blocks west, St. Mary of Nazareth Hospital decided to stay and expand its medical facilities by building a $43 million, 490-bed hospital. It is the first hospital building to be erected from the ground up in the inner city of Chicago since 1968. Scattered nearby are many newly built structures, including a city fire station, the Ukrainian Church of Saints Volovymer and Olha, the Roberto Clemente High School and a Chicago Board of Health clinic.

A decade ago the area was almost panicked by the prospect of total

racial turnover — from all white to all black. An active homeowner who has lived in East Humboldt Park most of his life described the situation then and now:

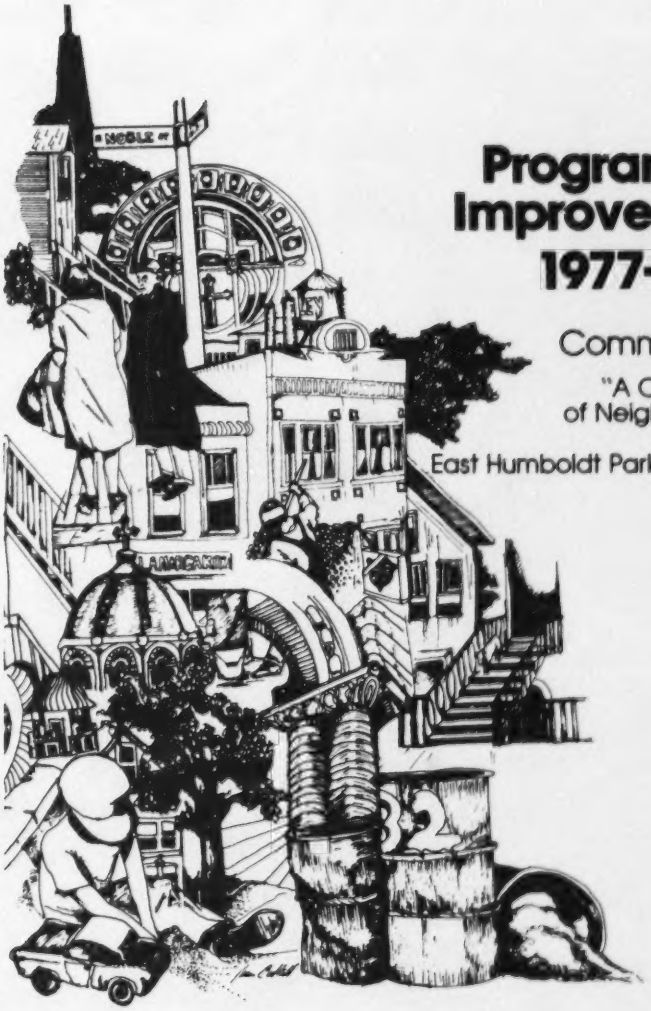
> In the late 1960's everybody was jittery about racial inundation. They expected that the Negro families moving in were the first of many waves that would push them out. Now that racial change has been stabilized, fears are dissolving. Our Peabody School is 22 per cent Negro. But there's no hullabaloo. What other neighborhood today has so many private schools? So many choices for parents? Have you ever seen the colors of kids attending the Catholic schools? It's like a rainbow.
>
> In other city neighborhoods, public housing is a dirty word. But we welcomed two high-rises as public housing for the elderly. One is twenty stories high; the other, nine. Both government-owned buildings are racially mixed, twenty per cent Negro. Many of the Polish old-timers now live in them. So do some elderly Mexicans and Puerto Ricans. These apartments add to our pride; they are part of our community. Not so with the two non-elderly high-rises near the Kennedy Expressway. These are privately developed and owned and are almost 100 per cent Negro. Right or wrong, we dump the blame for not keeping them racially balanced on the Department of Urban Renewal.
>
> My neighbors all believe that if Latinos hadn't started moving into East Humboldt Park, Negro families would have flooded the neighborhood instead. You would be amazed to see how nonchalant my neighbors are now about the presence of Negroes in school, in church or in the stores. I guess you could call us a salt and pepper neighborhood, but mixed with a lot of Spanish spices. And don't overlook our World War II veteran who sang the Star Spangled Banner in Italian to open one of our planning meetings in East Humboldt Park.

With racial change now a minor concern, East Humboldt Park residents were relaxed enough to plan for the neighborhood's future and to consider more calmly their various options for physical and social betterment.

The Program for Improvement: 1977—1980

The planning process officially launched late in 1975 by the East Humboldt Park community, under the guidance of Marcy Kaptur, produced its first tangible results nearly a year later, when the comprehensive neighborhood plan, entitled *Program for Improvement: 1977–1980,* was released. The *Program* reflects a distinctive philosophy of neighborhood planning, an amalgam of resident and professional insights which went into its preparation. It developed guidelines which are intended to reverse the community's downward slide and to help begin the long journey toward rehabilitation and visible improvement. As highlighted in the *Program for Improvement,* these are East Humboldt Park's guidelines for neighborhood rejuvenation:

> ● The basic objective . . . is to insure the residents of the community of their right to stay in the neighborhood.



Program For Improvement 1977-1980

Community 21

"A Community of Neighborhoods"

East Humboldt Park, Chicago

Cover of the *Program for Improvement.* One thousand copies of the 103-page planning report were printed. Later a 15-page summary was issued, of which 5000 copies in English and 3000 in Spanish were distributed.

- The primary concern is upgrading of the community through repair of older buildings and construction of new homes and apartments on vacant lots without pricing current residents out of the neighborhood.

- The neighborhood is the building block of city planning . . . . East Humboldt Park is a community of neighborhoods . . . . If there is one underlying theme throughout, it is that the neighborhood unit is recognized as the primary form of human settlement and placed in the special context it deserves . . . . Residential neighborhoods must be protected over time.

- The concerns that have surfaced in this community through the planning process revolve mainly around how to keep this a working class area in the face of major rehabilitation and development efforts. This is a particularly important issue here because so many of this community's residents work in the industrial park south of Grand Avenue and are convenient to their place of employment.

- In order to keep money that is already here in this area and attract a limited amount of additional wealth, there is a commitment in this plan to provide housing, either new or rehabbed, for the middle income market.

To carry out these policies, the *Program for Improvement* proposes specific changes to upgrade the physical environment, such as landscaping the Kennedy Expressway to eliminate pollution and noise; repairing ordinary sidewalks and finding ways to improve the vaulted sidewalks; using vacant land for more parks and playlots; protecting interior residential streets from industrial traffic leaving the overcrowded expressway; and preventing major commercial intrusions into residential neighborhoods. Despite East Humboldt Park's unorthodox approach to community planning (among some planning professionals there is a dying maxim which fingers the neighborhood as the planner's mortal enemy), the three-year program for community betterment is surprisingly conventional. Its improvement targets are achievable, and modest demands are made upon city officials, "The program is so down to earth," one city planner observed, "that it is likely to attract support in unlikely places. Its workmanship as a plan can hardly be faulted."

What East Humboldt Park's *Program for Improvement* represents is an alternate strategy for the improvement of certain kinds of inner city neighborhoods. The upwardly mobile poor do not need to be replaced by an established middle class. The strategy further assumes that deterioration is not inevitable because a neighborhood is old, undergoing racial and ethnic change, mainly occupied by low-income households, or the victim of earlier mistakes in planning. Against the grain of conventional wisdom, the *Program for Improvement* strives to revive East Humboldt Park and simultaneously to reserve it as a residence for low and moderate income families. Mrs. Gale Cincotta, head of the Metropolitan Area Housing Alliance with which NCO has been associated, is one of the city's and nation's most articulate champions of this viewpoint: "I don't

buy the argument that a changing neighborhood automatically means a poor financial risk."

The pros and cons of using the *Program for Improvement's* approach to East Humboldt Park deserve conscientious assessment. The obstacles that block realization of East Humboldt Park's improvement strategy are as formidable as they are impressive. The hindrances may come from without or arise from within the neighborhood itself.

Threats from the Outside

How probable is it that the East Humboldt Park community will be able to realize its program? There is no clear-cut answer. On the negative side, a fifth of the families live in poverty. On the positive side, another fifth can afford to buy a home. Will the revitalized neighborhoods envisaged by the *Program for Improvement* indeed attract and retain families with incomes high enough to purchase a home? Will the three-year improvement program halt the community's slide downhill and begin the uphill struggle to improve living conditions and restore neighborhood self-esteem?

These are not idle or rhetorical questions. Since 1950, as large cities throughout the United States have begun rebuilding their dilapidated sections in the inner ring, few have been renewed so that the new rents remain within the economic reach of the original residents. The prototype of successful urban renewal, whether governmental or private, is still the neighborhood where the costs of rebuilding elevate the price of homes or apartments beyond the reach of low and moderate income families. For major improvements require a substantial dollar investment that, in turn, pushes up housing prices. As the solid revival of an inner city neighborhood is ensured, it is no surprise that the chief beneficiaries turn out to be middle class newcomers. With few exceptions, only they can afford the more expensive rents.

This postwar experience with federally-funded programs for the redevelopment of the inner city supports those forces that will threaten the successful implementation of the *Program for Improvement.* Highly-respected urban economists and geographers have been applying the "triage" principle in classifying urban neighborhoods and assigning governmental priorities accordingly. Under this principle, it is assumed that some neighborhoods will survive and flourish without special attention from government; others will be able to halt the sprawl of blight only with public assistance; and a third group of neighborhoods will keep decaying and eventually die no matter what action the government takes. The triage-minded financiers and planners advise private investors and public officials to steer clear of neighborhoods which they tag as "dead real estate." Some of them have already diagnosed East Humboldt Park as a hopeless case. They argue that it is more economical for such a neighborhood to deteriorate and self-destruct, and they counsel investors to wait

until an economically available alternative appears for the land's highest and best use. Then, they claim, it will be cheaper and easier to develop the land since there will be fewer residents to protest and local institutions will be too weak to complain.

Labeling neighborhoods as hopeless sets a self-fulfilling prophecy into motion. Banks and other lending institutions "redline" the area and shut off the flow of credit. Because credit is scarce, upwardly-mobile families bypass the neighborhood. And the cycle of decline repeats itself. There are no indications that credit is readily available in East Humboldt Park. Father John cites the case of a parishioner who went to a neighborhood bank for a rehabilitation loan only to be told by a Latino credit officer: "Your application was denied because the area is Spanish, and loans are not made there."

Stanley Hallett of the Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University compares the flow of credit to a community's water system which is equally vital to survival. When financial water, i.e. credit, turns into a trickle, the entire community suffers. Outsiders, such as the mass media, encourage the self-fulfilling prophecy by designating an area as a "slum."

Urban doomsayers do abound, whether they are parents who leave the city to settle their families in the suburbs or academics who use university podiums for their predictions of woe. The closest university to East Humboldt Park, a mile away, is the Circle Campus of the University of Illinois where Pierre de Vise, an urban geographer, announced in 1974 that "America's cities are sick, if not dying." In his urban obituary he included Chicago and its inner city. Earlier Ashley Montagu, a Princeton University anthropologist, arrived at the very same campus to tell its students, some of whom were residents of East Humboldt Park, "I see no hope for big cities; there is no reason they should continue to exist . . . [they are] disaster areas where human beings cannot be fulfilled." Such doomsday talk, even by a tiny minority, is unlikely to encourage a detente between town and gown — because ideas do have consequences.

Take the story of Elizabeth Bielski (that is not her real name though her story is true). She grew up in East Humboldt Park, attended Holy Trinity grammar school (now closed), Holy Family Academy (still open) and Circle Campus (the scene of the crime). She spoke Polish at home before she learned English in school. Her parents still live at the same address and speak practically no English. Married in 1976, she works as a computer programmer while living in a skyscraper apartment overlooking Lake Michigan. What about the old neighborhood? "It was a good place to grow up," she says fondly.

Elizabeth Bielski is the story of America. During the last century millions of young people left farms in Iowa or Ireland to find work in the big cities of the United States. Today, the tides of immigration have shifted or subsided. But in Chicago itself migration continues, from bungalows or two-flats to suburban ranch houses or skyscrapers near the lake.

Unless held together by ethnicity or race and served by sturdy social institutions with a dedicated staff, low and moderate income areas seldom survive as neighborhoods. The more successful ones are those which have been able to retain a population mix, economically and socially, because enough upwardly-mobile families stay around. Such a balance makes for mutual support and keeps the neighborhood alive. For over a hundred years U.S. cities survived because such poor and working class neighborhoods did not have to import a middle class; they grew their own. Enough of the successful adults remained to give leadership and to provide grown-up models for growing children. Why did some stay? Not for any single reason but for many: business interests, church involvement, political recognition, family kinship, or loyalty to a local institution which continued to play an important part in their lives.

In the last half of the 20th century, the geographical compression of dependent, poverty-burdened families, especially those with single heads of households, weakened or destroyed one neighborhood after another. This concentration was present not just in public housing projects; it became a way of life in the poverty-ridden inner city. In the 1960's many an older black-occupied neighborhood became a wasteland of vacant lots, abandoned buildings and arson. Why? Because for the first time, a large and ever-growing number of black, middle income families found decent, standard housing and better schools outside the dilapidated ghetto. They left the black underclass behind them and vacated countless apartments with few families wanting to move in. Such inner city wastelands are not always occupied by blacks. Many predominantly white neighborhoods are equally threatened with wholesale evacuation. As upwardly-mobile families leave, it becomes harder and harder to find newly married couples to fill the vacancies. For example, *Chicagoland's Community Guide,* a 260-page handbook intended for families looking for homes and apartments, does not recommend East Humboldt Park as a desirable community to live in. The influential *Guide,* used widely by home-seekers, real estate brokers and financial institutions, "redlines" other inner city neighborhoods as well.

Threats from Within

Even though hope and purpose are there, East Humboldt Park's *Program For Improvement* does not spell out a strategy or detail a program to attract younger families throughout the next decade. With singular exceptions, the dedicated core of volunteers who carried on planning activities in East Humboldt Park during 1975 and 1976 were older residents. In the main, it was they who furnished Community 21-East Humboldt Park with its key leaders and supplied the members for planning committees. While they have pride in their community and an unshaken confidence in its future, they have not fully articulated the reasons for their hope.

What image does East Humboldt Park project to those who might consider moving in? How do the schools, churches, settlement houses,

fraternal organizations, and other institutions see their own future and their relationship to East Humboldt Park in the 1980's? How smoothly and effectively are existing institutions accommodating their programs to the newly-arriving populations? Will the newcomers, with unfamiliar life-styles, support institutions built by and for other groups in another century? Can new institutional loyalties blossom in such a setting? Until 1975 a *laissez-faire* attitude seemed to dominate the community: let the market place determine the results. "We have a distinguished history, second to none, as a port of entry for new arrivals to the city," one elderly teacher observed with conspicuous pride, "and we do not plan to jeopardize this reputation in the years that lie ahead."

No matter how eloquent the teacher's words were, the fact remains that a port of entry is an area of constant turnover and even turmoil. Under such circumstances institutional loyalties are lightly held and potential leaders likely to depart. While concerned about the external forces which may threaten East Humboldt Park's status quo, the community's leadership does not yet have a solid, comprehensive grasp of the area's internal strengths and weaknesses; it does not possess a clearly-stated, well-considered strategy to attract and retain newlyweds and other upwardly-mobile families.

Does this mean that the residents are lackadaisical or ignorant about the assets and liabilities of East Humboldt Park's balance sheet? Not necessarily. Individually, a great many of them recognize and acknowledge the area's unique features: its low rents and unbelievably inexpensive housing; the built-up schools, churches, and settlement houses which display a high degree of commitment to the community; a public transportation network superior to that of most other Chicago communities; centers of intensive employment within walking distance; and convenient commercial strips with an extensive assortment of shops and services. But the residents' individual perceptions, though widely shared, have not been collected or crystallized into a consensus which can be promulgated through a brochure, a poster, or a visual presentation. There is no strategic plan which affirmatively markets East Humboldt Park.

For example, East Humboldt Park has no regular publication similar to the one issued by Chicago's Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council which claims to be the oldest surviving community organization in the United States. The Council, too, represents a working class community which once bordered the Chicago Stockyards, now gone, but made famous by Carl Sandburg and Upton Sinclair. The Council also distributes a popular leaflet, *Sound Advice for Homeowners,* which not only recounts the advantages of staying back of the yards but also contains a section entitled, "Buying a Home Elsewhere May be a Headache."

The Impact of the Program for Improvement

The first step to present the community's favorable side began with the

publication of the *Program for Improvement: 1977–1980.* A handsome, elegantly printed report of 103 pages, it endows its sponsors with a halo of distinction, for its visual attractiveness and planning content can readily generate a symbol around which East Humboldt Park residents might be willing to rally. Not only might the report gain the allegiance of community residents; it might also attract outsiders who never realized that East Humboldt Park existed behind the Kennedy Expressway. Now, old-time residents have something, in print and in hand, which justifies their having stayed around so long and which confirms their confidence in East Humboldt Park's future.

The *Program for Improvement* is a balm for their bruised hopes. For newcomers it offers a view of what their neighborhood might someday become. Here is the proof that the ancient religious maxim that man does not live by bread alone has a modern meaning. Inner city neighbors too need signs and a visions to excite their imagination — to motivate them as they work together. Whether intended or not, the report is an exercise in consciousness-raising. It represents the first positive sign of hope that long-time residents and community leaders have seen in nearly a decade. Furthermore, the report is not a self-serving document. It is stubbornly factual and coldly analytical, glossing over none of the area's many environmental problems:

> The narrow streets and small spaces tucked onto courtyards, gardens, and charming flats are reminiscent of a time when the scale of human settlement was much more personal and less a product of mass production. However, the advent of heavy industry in the late 1800's and the automobile in the 20th century make these environments increasingly difficult to protect, especially in view of the limited yard space, crowded streets, and conflicting mixed uses.
>
> By looking at the statistics on East Humboldt Park, it is safe to assume that without any neighborhood action, this community will be impoverished in the next 10 to 20 years. The aging housing stock and low rents will continue to attract only those at the bottom end of the income scale.

Yet, the *Program for Improvement* exudes a promise that conditions might change, enlivening the prospect that neighborhood improvement is no longer a vain wish. When a resident who had been actively involved in the community planning saw the report for the first time, she exclaimed:

> Have we enough copies for all property owners? They will treasure it. You can count on that. It will give them a new lease on life and raise expectations. Some might live up to them. Fix and paint windows. Plant gardens. Repair fences and walkways. And, maybe, come to our meetings!
>
> That drawing on the report's cover will give my friends who ran from the neighborhood a case of envy. Am I in luck!

The planning journey that resulted in the *Program for Improvement* was

not without adventures. At each stage along the way, unexpected obstacles had to be surmounted, dragons born of earlier mistakes overcome. For example: could volunteers be found to distribute the planning questionnaires written in three different languages? By replacing confrontation with cooperation, would East Humboldt Park's planning committee betray the community to the political and business establishment? Where would new funds be found to carry out the three-year program? Taken as a whole, this accumulated experience could be valuable to East Humboldt Park residents as they start traveling once again, this time to enlist their neighbors in the campaign for neighborhood improvement.

Building on Past Successes

Even with a plan of their own making to guide them, the residents' next trip is highly unlikely to escape detours, dead-ends and potholes. The challenge is to convert the successful experiences of 1975-76 into nine guideposts toward 1980:

1) Building upon indigenous contacts and resources, East Humboldt Park set up a system for citizen involvement which united rather than divided the community. In contrast, the Pilsen community, where neighborhood planning was also undertaken with local and Chicago Central Area Committee funds, soon found itself split into quarreling factions unable to muster broadly based enthusiasm for a preliminary "Pilsen Neighborhood Plan." The conflict was heightened by the organization of a Pilsen-based "Coalition Against Plan 21." The Coalition sought to rally residents' attention to the "threat" that the *Chicago 21* plan posed for Pilsen's low and moderate income families; it succeeded in demoralizing much of the community's backing for Pilsen's Plan. In East Humboldt Park, however, the planning not only helped reweave the fabric of the community but also uncovered new leaders to help finish the plan.

2) The icy climate between community leaders and the city began thawing out with Marcy Kaptur becoming the chief icebreaker. Her ability to enlist the assistance of a dozen city and county agencies confounded the early skeptics among NCO officials and staff. Without fanfare, city and county agencies supplied population data, tax files, project information, cost estimates, maps, and helpful advice as requested. The city's Department of Development and Planning assigned a planner to work with her and the planning committee.

3) There is little doubt that East Humboldt Park's planning has earned the respect and support of the influential businessmen who make up the Chicago Central Area Committee. The cooperation which they had once grudgingly and reluctantly conceded to East Humboldt Park's leadership had now turned to a high esteem as they scanned the community's accomplishments. It was the first and, at this writing, the only *Chicago 21*

residential area to produce a plan for community improvement. Furthermore the three-year plan did not turn out to be a grab bag of non-negotiable demands but a set of specific proposals carefully staged for the betterment of the community. The Chicago Central Area Committee had been helpful in bridging the gulf to and from City Hall. In the days to come, the downtown businessmen would be seen as vehicles for attracting long-overdue resources to East Humboldt Park. They were also potential allies in the rehabilitation of old housing and deteriorating stores, in the strengthening of local institutions, and in monitoring the quantity and quality of government services to the area.

4) As a result of the steady exchange between East Humboldt Park and downtown, a temporary bridge was erected between the tight little island known as NCO and mainland Chicago. During the many months of planning, this new viaduct, invisible but real, received heavy use — in both directions — by businessmen, employees of city agencies, and East Humboldt Park's own leaders who became, as it were, unofficial bridgetenders. They successfully used the bridge to negotiate with the power brokers in city hall and downtown. One businessman noted:

> The disbelievers in NCO got the message. East Humboldt Park had demonstrated that its leaders could get the aid of downtown's officialdom without paying off in political promises and without selling out the community to land-hungry developers.

5) East Humboldt Park's *Program for Improvement* and the planning that preceded it produced a double benefit for NCO, the parent body. The centrifugal force generated by East Humboldt Park enhanced NCO's prestige city-wide and nationally. The guiding presence of the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs enabled East Humboldt Park to finish the planning job for which NCO was the prime sponsor and contractor. Understandably, NCO was not reluctant to accept the credit given it in the wider world beyond Chicago's near northwest side.

The centripetal force powered by East Humboldt Park's success was equally beneficial to NCO, but in an unexpected way. Its sprawling organizational apparatus, it was becoming clear, could not satisfy the demands of smaller-sized areas for neighborhood planning and development. The entire six square miles of NCO's turf was just too large an area to accommodate neighborhood-based, individualized planning. The importance of smaller areas had already surfaced as each of the NCO "civics" called for a fair share of the improvement projects to be built by federal Community Development funds. The "civics" were asking NCO to give meticulous attention to the special needs of each block, of smaller neighborhoods, and of local insititutions. Now that East Humboldt Park had its plan, each NCO "civic" was clamoring for one of its own, for a similar analysis of neighborhood strengths and weaknesses and for equal priority.

Along the way, NCO reaped a fringe benefit. As East Humboldt Park

residents applauded NCO's support of planning to improve their community's physical environment and to rehabilitate its housing, NCO's image and credibility were upgraded. East Humboldt Park was one section where a residue of ill-will still remained from the "encroachment" of two high-rise buildings which, it was claimed, NCO had allowed to be built.

6) The cooperation which the NCO leadership gave to the preparation of East Humboldt Park's *Program for Improvement* deepened its confidence in NCO itself and ensured the continuing interest of the Washington-based National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs in the near northwest side. As a national organization with solid neighborhood roots, NCUEA became more committed to helping NCO revitalize not only East Humboldt Park but also other communities along the Milwaukee Avenue diagonal. Also, NCUEA's high credit rating and its alliance with NCO had a decisive impact upon the decision of the Campaign for Human Development (the U.S. Catholic bishops' anti-poverty fund for support of self-help programs) to award a grant of $31,500 to implement East Humboldt Park's plans in 1977.

7) Churches and schools which had been struggling to survive under the weight of rising costs and vulnerable, old buildings took a second look at themselves and their future in East Humboldt Park. After years of neglect and stagnation — decades of inaction — was the winter of despair finally to end? Was the *Program for Improvement* the first shoot of a new springtime? Had East Humboldt Park actually accomplished the impossible and taken the first step on the long road to reversing neighborhood deterioration and the flight of younger families? As one merchant said:

> I never expected that it would be possible to turn this community around. I remain a pessimist. But, now there is a faint possibility. It's too early to talk about probability. A lot more work has to be done. But I keep asking myself: can the penicillin of good planning and wide community involvement finally make a difference? I'm going to stay around a little while longer to find out.

8) The *Program for Improvement: 1977–1980* headed into its first year of implementation with several influential endorsements. Terry Gabinski, the alderman who represents the upper portion of the East Humboldt Park area, gave it high praise. A letter of commendation from Lewis W. Hill, Commissioner of the Department of Development and Planning, is included as an introduction. The prominence given Hill's letter in the plan reflected East Humboldt Park's desire to have the city not only endorse the plan but also embrace it as a guide to the city's own planning. Only a month before Hill's letter arrived, in August 1976 a bulletin from Father John to East Humboldt Park residents said:

> For many years we have seen our neighborhood going downhill. None of our elected officials were able to stop it. For many years we have been threatened by Urban Renewal plans and bulldozers . . . . If the City

> approves our plan — this neighborhood will *not* be demolished *but* improved!!!

Hill's letter contained this paragraph in which the local residents invest mighty significance:

> This city has a deep concern for maintaining the viability and diversity of Chicago's neighborhoods as they head toward the 21st century, and this Plan and the results that come from it could be a significant part of that effort.

Subsequently, the Chicago Central Area Committee, the downtown "partner" in the neighborhood planning, "unanimously" endorsed the recommendations in the *Program for Improvement* saying that the

> endorsement was based on three findings: a) the Community 21 Planning Committee's plan is consistent with the recommendations contained in the *Chicago 21* plan; b) the recommended programs are achievable and will serve to help revitalize the neighborhoods involved; and c) it is just this kind of on-going community activity which we had hoped to encourage as we completed *Chicago 21*.

9) The 1975–76 planning phase had tested NCO's flexibility and East Humboldt Park's ingenuity. Despite a lurking fear that East Humboldt Park might secede and create its own independent organization, the plan was completed. A split did not occur. East Humboldt Park kept its ties to the NCO family. What sustained the affiliation? The first, and most important, reason was that Father John played his role as a mediator skillfully. Simultaneously, he was able to represent NCO's concerns and to voice East Humboldt Park's hopes. Thanks to his playing the difficult role of middleman so well, the neighborhood's planning, including the work of the NCUEA professional, was given a free hand. At the same time, East Humboldt Park's residents began to appreciate how important NCO's sponsorship had been in 1974 and 1975, when East Humboldt Park was first trying to organize itself to undertake the 1976 planning.

If the East Humboldt Park community can translate the lessons learned in these nine achievements, then by 1980 the community may have realized all or part of its three-year program and the downhill slide may have been arrested. Furthermore, new residents will have been attracted, old ones reassured, and the property owners strengthened in their determination to revive their neighborhood.

6

End or Beginning?

Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is perhaps, the end of the beginning.— Winston Churchill, 1942

From Planning to Development

A paid advertisement appeared in the August 15, 1976 issue of *TAB*, the semi-monthly bulletin of the American Society of Planning Officials. It described a new position that was open with the Northwest Community Organization:

> *Neighborhood Planning Project Manager.* A unique planning effort among an indigenous community people, downtown businessmen, and city planning agencies to implement a housing rehabilitation plan for multi-ethnic, older inner-city neighborhood on the near northwest side of Chicago. Planning expertise, together with experience in working with community organizations is required. Salary $10,000 to $14,000. Effective date: September 1976. Submit resume to Father John Hillenbrand, Northwest Community Organization, 1109 North Ashland Avenue, Chicago, Illinois 60622.

That help wanted ad, without saying so, announced the end of the community planning process which the National Center for Urban Ethnic Affairs had undertaken. Having finished her work, Marcy Kaptur had moved on to a new assignment in the White House. NCO itself took over and was now in direct control of future development in East Humboldt Park. In assuming the reins of power, NCO made a calculated decision to embrace East Humboldt Park's activities more closely and to make certain that they fitted into NCO's own priorities. Significantly, neither Community 21-East Humboldt Park, its office, its new community plan, nor the *Chicago 21* plan was mentioned in the ad. As ever, Father John remained as the public link between East Humboldt Park's past, present, and future.

Nor did the advertisement make it clear what it was that was beginning. It did not reveal, and perhaps rightly so, the undercurrent of disagreement which flowed through NCO about the appropriate role for a community organization in the redevelopment of a neighborhood. NCO's elected officials, its founding fathers (some of whom were still around), its present staff and East Humboldt Park's leaders had many questions, few answers.

Will the momentum generated by East Humboldt Park's activities endure over the next three years?

During 1975 and 1976, under Father John's adroit leadership and Kaptur's initiative, East Humboldt Park enjoyed considerable freedom of movement, while remaining loyal to NCO. Extensive citizen participation, loaned talent, favorable publicity, and the downtown connection inevitably set East Humboldt Park off with a distinctive identity. As its boundaries became better known, the aroused community no longer considered itself situated in some unknown corner of the near northwest side. The community's presence was felt not only on home ground but also downtown and city-wide.

Not surprisingly, NCO's flexibility is once more being put to the test. The question is whether East Humboldt Park's unique concerns will be discarded in the re-shuffling of NCO's highly competitive agenda. It is NCO which will decide: (1) whether the Community 21-East Humboldt Park office on West Chestnut Street will be kept open; (2) whether the newly-hired neighborhood planning project manager will be headquartered there or in the NCO's main office on Ashland Avenue; (3) whether the project manager's time will be concentrated on executing the *Program for Improvement* or be squandered over NCO's six square miles; and (4) whether East Humboldt Park will enjoy the right to allocate and spend the $31,500 grant from the Campaign for Human Development. (These funds were given to the "East Humboldt Park Organization" to "enable residents to share in the decision-making process with regard to the renewal of their own community.") Real tension exists between NCO's interests and those of East Humboldt Park. For the choice is now NCO's. Its leadership can unilaterally impose its viewpoint on East Humboldt Park's residents and squelch their striving for self-determination. Or it can encourage the heightened expectations of the East Humboldt Park residents as they respond to two key issues which need to be faced almost immediately.

If East Humboldt Park is to receive the attention that its residents were promised in 1976, two decisions become important. As a first step, will the project manager be directly accountable to East Humboldt Park's leaders as was the case during the planning? If this is done, only those matters which are clearly beyond East Humboldt Park's ability or ken would be delegated to the NCO. It is not only possible but also desirable for a community to become more self-reliant without claiming to be

self-sufficient. A "Community 21 Board" seeking to represent all organizations in East Humboldt Park is now in the process of formation. At this writing, however, it is still not clear what the responsibility of the Community 21 Board will be and whether it will have a staff of its own. At present, the staffing is temporary and part-time, furnished by NCO. As the second step, will there be an "engine" to reverse the decline of East Humboldt Park — a not-for-profit corporation which, when spun off, would have to be independent enough to make development decisions speedily and to execute commitments promptly? As a free-wheeling entity, it would have to be resourceful enough to convince owner-occupants to repair run-down buildings, while finding builders to erect new houses for moderate income families on vacant, rubble-strewn lots. The *Program for Improvement* specifically calls for:

> creation of a developmental entity to insure the program's completion. The exact form of this mechanism is dependent on the decisions made by the Northwest Community Organization and the Community 21 Planning Committee.

The deadline for turning the community around is too immediate to allow residents to be lured into another debating society while their neighborhood withers and dies. Strategically, East Humboldt Park's planning did not produce a long-range plan but a detailed program for improvement: specific targets and a three-year timetable to achieve them.

After fifteen years of dedication to exorcising public and private demons who might devour its domain, is NCO flexible enough to lead the drive for East Humboldt Park's rebirth?

Good planning is like childbearing: easy to conceive, hard to deliver. NCO now has a plan — on paper — for East Humboldt Park, but no clear strategy to develop and deliver the programs which could revitalize that community. Unless NCO concocts such a development strategy and finds a staff competent enough to carry it out, the *Program for Improvement* will get its usual publicity in the mass media, reap praise from all sides, and soon be forgotten. Following World War II, many community organizations in Chicago hired planning consultants, some more expensive than others, to package community plans. Almost without exception such plans were never implemented. Even NCO has its *Peoples Conservation Plan* going back to 1969.

What will be the destiny of East Humboldt Park's plan? It may meet the fate of other such plans because the sponsoring community organization undervalued the role of development. On the other hand, it may become the springboard for developing and delivering the programs that could rescue a sinking community. At a minimum, the community will have to find untapped sources of financing, leadership that builds confidence in the community itself and not just in the community organization, top-flight sales persons who actively promote the community, and new

projects attractive enough to end disinvestment by the private sector in the neighborhood. By no means is this list all-inclusive.

From Community Organizing to Development

East Humboldt Park's future is currently caught up in an internal debate among NCO's leadership and staff over community development. Some argue that a community organization has no business being drawn into development. Others want to set up a separate corporation for implementing the *Program for Improvement*. Some see giving development high priority as handcuffing organizers and surrendering them to the establishment. Regardless of the spectrum of opinion, the crucial need for community development in East Humboldt Park will not go away. The danger is that this priority will be lost in the day-to-day deadlines and organizing concerns of the NCO staff. The pressure of other "civics" for NCO's attention may sideline East Humboldt Park's own pressing need: to concentrate talent of the highest quality in order to implement the *Program for Improvement*. Thus, East Humboldt Park's own restoration could be jeopardized by the tug of war inherent in the transition from community organization to community development.

To etch the advantages of community development, it should be noted, is not to depreciate the importance of community organization. Traditional community organization, no matter how spectacular its street theatrics, is essentially a conservative undertaking. First, it is defensive in character, playing out its role as chief defense attorney on behalf of the community. As its full-time protector and defender, the organizer works to preserve the community against all enemies, foreign and domestic, who might threaten the status quo that residents want protected. Self-defensiveness and self-righteousness are constant companions as the organizer searches for issues and victories to satisfy his or her constituency. Without high visibility, the organizer's importance grows dim and is hard to recognize. Thus organizers are reluctant to enmesh themselves in development which is seen as limiting their freedom to storm the barricades on behalf of the people.

Secondly, by their training community organizers are usually willing to take risks — but seldom those associated with development. It is easier to distrust than to trust, simpler to put together a confrontation than a partnership. It is not merely a matter of style: combat fatigues, standard dress for NCO organizers, versus the Brooks Brothers' suit, the garment of a developer. The distinction is more subtle. In community development, power has to be shared with private institutions and public officials. In turn that leads to the sharing of responsibility, which is another way of saying that to negotiate effectively one has to give something in return. Collective bargaining replaces collective battling. The fireworks of confrontation are put aside for telephone calls, conferences and the use of ordinary channels of influence, such as politics and friendship.

Development is entrepreneurial i.e. enterprising and risk taking; it cultivates potential resources the way a farmer cares for his soil and crops. It creates those conditions which will entice the right kind of investment. Sometimes, the realizing of these conditions may require only a manicure: green lawns, trimmed hedges, sparkling windows, varnished doorways, attractive outdoor lights, etc. These are the smaller investments of a property owner. Larger investors may need more incentives to persuade them to take a risk. When public or private funds are scarce, wheedling becomes the name of the game. If investors are scared, they must be reassured. The flow of private dollars into rehabilitation of commercial properties is easily turned off by sudden change, uncertainty, turmoil and conflict. This truism applies to resident owners and absentee investors alike.

Thirdly, organizing is more glamorous in the short run. Neighborhood clean-up campaigns make poor organizing issues. But confrontation may make the evening news on the television and the headlines in the daily press. To get this attention the community must be wound up to a new crisis at regular intervals. On the other hand, planning and development are seen as tedious, painstaking, fact-grubbing. Almost inevitably, development is long-range, producing few short-term victories.

The task of development is seldom understood at all; usually it is seen as an extension of organizing: mobilizing, demanding, and winning. The unique qualities of neighborhood development go unappreciated: high-level bargaining, attention to nitty-gritty detail, painstaking follow-through, proposals and counterproposals, patience with intolerable delays, skill in finding keys to closed doors, applying the right kind of leverage, and finding agreement on mutual goals. Such negotiations work better when held across the table than when shouted across the room in a public auditorium.

To borrow from the military metaphors on which community organizers tend to rely, the question ultimately becomes whether a low-income, inner city neighborhood can survive never-ending warfare. "Victories lead to [new] battles," is the way the organizer's purpose is described by Shel Trapp, former staff director for NCO. But when an armed war ends, the generals are usually not the ones to establish the conditions of peace. That job is left to statesmen, politicians, diplomats and others skilled in the art of compromise and in redeveloping the economies of war-ravaged nations. If organizers are the military staff for the war which a community organization fights, are they also capable of negotiating the peace? The function of development is to allow vigilant and resourceful neighbors to enjoy peace in a community which is rebuilding itself.

To arrest the decay in older neighborhoods East Humboldt Park needs, perhaps, a strategy such as the one used in Brooklyn by the Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation. Its President, Franklin A. Thomas,

explained the Bedford-Stuyvesant approach to neighborhood development as follows:

> We found that one-third of the buildings needed minor, cosmetic repairs; one-third required major rehabilitation; and the final third needed little, if any renovation. We decided to give top priority to preserving the first group of houses because we would get the people themselves immediately involved. We wanted some immediate, visible evidence of progress to alleviate the usual skepticism and cynicism in older areas. To regain the community's confidence in itself, we repaired sidewalks, fixed iron rails, scrubbed and painted exteriors, installed doors and did some landscaping.
>
> In the first five years we restored 2,500 buildings. While this restoration was going on, we began four time-consuming jobs: rehabilitating the houses that were in bad shape; persuading companies to locate in the area, to help neighborhood businesses get on their feet and to increase local employment possibilities; improving public services; and initiating youth programs, block parties and street fairs.

Will NCO adapt its style to the fresh obligations which it accepted when it agreed to follow through with East Humboldt Park's *Program for Improvement?* The test case will be the job definition for the "neighborhood planning project manager." If the new manager's experience and talents cater to activities which are largely developmental, NCO will have taken the first step to meet this challenge. For then the bridge to downtown businessmen, city officials, university social scientists, and others will be kept open for two-way traffic.

Will NCO now accommodate itself to the partnership approach, as evolved by East Humboldt Park during the planning period, with those whom NCO regards as the community's archenemies?

A fragile, three-way partnership was arranged among:

- Local community leaders who have faith in the community's future and residents who would stay to invest in the rehabilitation of their properties as a vote of confidence in the neighborhood's prospects;
- The city government which has to upgrade its housekeeping services (garbage collection, street cleaning, curb repairs, etc.); regulate traffic so that heavy duty trucks would no longer terrorize residential streets; help channel low-interest loans to residents who want to remodel their homes; and find the engineering and financial resources to end the debilitating impact of vaulted sidewalks; and
- Downtown businessmen who see the revitalization of East Humboldt Park as a target integral to the success of the *Chicago 21* plan and who would thus aid East Humboldt Park in preserving its existing housing stock, building new housing on vacant lots and making sure that sufficient money is available for rehabilitation and new construction.

Such a working partnership will irrigate the development process so that something does indeed happen, conditions do improve, and others

are encouraged to remodel their properties as well. In any successful partnership, credit is shared, not monopolized. Compromises are negotiated. There are no individual victors or losers. No one loses face. The partnership is a relationship among peers, equals who acknowledge that mutual goals do exist; it is not a "you give" and "we take" arrangement. As mutual goals are defined, each party to the negotiations achieves something for those it represents. How often has it been said that urban resources are limited? The holder of resources, whether he has talent, time or money, usually has a choice as to where they will be spent. Confrontation is unlikely to encourage such investment. A community climate must be generated in which reluctant investors, commercial or residential, are willing to take the risk.

Neighborhood development depends upon cooperation. Its life blood is trust and respect. The distrust of the municipal bureaucracy among NCO leaders and its active rank and file is deep and endemic. Reasonable doubt exists as to whether the present leadership is willing to relinquish its monolithic view of city government and acknowledge its complexity, and thus adopt a more positive, development-oriented posture on behalf of East Humboldt Park's *Program for Improvement*. Nobody expressed amazement in the summer of 1976 when an NCO leader was quoted publicly as saying, "I hate politicians." Several weeks later, the Reverend James Neuman, pastor of Humboldt Park United Methodist Church, chairman of NCO's planning committee and a powerhouse in NCO decision-making, spoke to a downtown forum sponsored by TRUST Inc. He called the audience's attention to City Hall's "repeated betrayal" of his community and doubted the city's sincerity in any aid given to East Humboldt Park's planning committee. Neither Neuman nor his church is located in East Humboldt Park. Thus, the ghost of urban renewal stays around to haunt NCO old-timers as they decide whether or not the new trail blazed by East Humboldt Park residents will be followed between 1977 and 1980.

The fear of the rickety bridge which East Humboldt Park neighbors had constructed was by no means confined to the "cold war warriors" in NCO. "In the beginning," a cooperative municipal official said, "we were never sure whether they were building a bridge or a gangplank. While we wait to see which way things go, you can be sure we will watch our step." Wary city officials seem more willing than are NCO activists to forget years of failure, defeat and frustration on the near northwest side. But the Berlin Wall which separates NCO and two of the area's four elected aldermen still presents a challenge to those who advocate a continuing detente.

Fortunately, the business leaders downtown are not burdened with such a history of unproductive confrontation. Nor do they have a preconceived strategy as to what is best for East Humboldt Park. The peacemaker role between the city and the community suits them well. In

an April 1976 communication to Mayor Richard J. Daley, East Humboldt Park's spokesmen wrote:

> The planning underway . . . represents a unique cooperative effort between the private sector, the city government, and community people with the emphasis on plan implementation.

It should be stressed that those words accurately represented East Humboldt Park's point of view when Kaptur, the NCUEA planner, was still around. Her contribution to East Humboldt Park, largely unrecognized, was her disarming naiveté. Unencumbered by prior experiences, old prejudices and local fears of dealing with city officials, she was free to do what seemed best for East Humboldt Park. Hill's commendatory letter to Father John, as chairman of East Humboldt Park's planning committee, and the committee's own memorandum to the Mayor, do give downtown businessmen the opportunity to continue where Kaptur left off. They can insist that a bonafide, three-way partnership be a condition of their future support of East Humboldt Park's plans for renovation.

Can representatives of local merchants and professionals (lawyers, dentists, or doctors) become involved in East Humboldt Park's future?

Despite strenuous efforts to recruit them, these groups remained on the sidelines during most of the planning period. Over the years, the concerns of storekeepers and tradesmen (for example, shoplifting, street crime, better lighting, and more off-the-street parking) have seldom been given serious attention in the daily affairs of NCO. Hence, the area's business leadership is fragmented, fearful, and unstable. The businessmen's associations and chambers of commerce meet infrequently, barely able to survive. While many local merchants contributed to enable East Humboldt Park to hire its planning consultant, only a handful took any part in putting together the *Program for Improvement*. As a community with small shops, stores, and businesses of endless variety, though many an owner lives outside the area, the active support of businessmen for the *Program for Improvement* will turn out to be decisive. Their own prosperity depends on East Humboldt Park as an up-and-coming neighborhood whose family purchasing power is also going up. Will a new emphasis on development attract them and enlist their active support?

Can more Latinos be found to take an active part in the community's program for improvement?

Participation of Latinos in the planning was nominal. During the last decade NCO has faced great difficulties in cultivating Puerto Rican organizations which tend to see NCO as a rival spokesman for their interests and membership. Several times in 1975-76, the hostility between NCO and Puerto Rican groups erupted publicly and in print. Fortunately, the publicity did not disrupt East Humboldt Park's hard-won solidarity.

On the other hand, NCO has succeeded in drawing Mexican-Americans into its policy-making councils. An NCO veteran remarked:

> It's a miracle that East Humboldt Park lived through the planning without a donnybrook. Our Puerto Rican spokesmen come and go. They are often inexperienced, highly vocal and express a point of view we don't always hear. Was it the heavy involvement of the churches and Erie House that kept the peace and ensured the silent cooperation of Puerto Ricans? Don't forget that East Humboldt Park houses a larger proportion of Mexican-American families than any other place on the northwest side.

Since the Puerto Rican and Mexican population is not insignificant in numbers and influence, grass-roots participation on their part becomes essential. Their absence, as well as that of small businessmen, from the leadership of East Humboldt Park, menaces the hope for community revival. A former NCO official doubted whether these groups would ever involve themselves deeply in East Humboldt Park's improvement program. He laid the problem at the doorstep of NCO's staff, saying:

> The Latinos' concerns are seldom reflected in the tactics and style of the NCO staff, however dedicated. The so-called cosmetic approach, symbolized by a paid-off mortgage, neat parkways, swept sidewalks, flower boxes in the windows, lace curtains and attractive entrances, is not exciting enough for organizers who have been trained to find enemies and defeat them.

The "crisis intervention" strategy has its merits. But a community such as East Humboldt Park also needs full-time leadership to reverse a slump in community pride and home maintenance; to halt a rise in vandalism and absentee ownership; to listen and respond to the complaints and fears of shopkeepers; and to understand the ambitions and hopes of Puerto Ricans.

Will East Humboldt Park be able to keep alive the community spirit and hope which were revived during 1975 and 1976?

The answer to that question will not be known until the 1980's. But there is telling evidence that an upsurge in the community's hope for its future has taken place. In a bulletin to his parishioners at St. Boniface, Father John wrote:

> If we do nothing, for sure our area will continue to decline . . . . If we tackle this problem together, we'll show that we plan to stay, that we love our neighborhood, and that we plan to pass on to our children and grandchildren one of the finest places to live in Chicago.

One of the many property owners who took an active part in East Humboldt Park's planning was a woman who had lived in the same house all of the 59 years of her life. Her viewpoint carried special meaning:

> We invested all our money in education. Our boys all got a good education. It cost a fortune, but that was our priority. Now we're fixing up the house — we already finished the outside. Next year we're going

> to do the inside. When we get the house fixed up, this place will be a palace. We don't want to move.

Without constant nourishment, that kind of spirit is unlikely to last — or spread. Without unmistakable signs of improvement year after year, older residents are not likely to invest in central heating and other improvements, while younger couples will go elsewhere to sink their roots.

The *Program for Improvement* gave that woman, her husband and scores of other property owners a sense of destiny. They had a hand in shaping the future of their neighborhood. They no longer saw themselves simply as victims of forces beyond their control. They had new hope. One evening in 1976, standing on the sidewalk in front of her house, the woman looked down the rows of cozy houses facing each other across the narrow street to a huge buildir g ablaze with thousands of lights. Waving her hand at the Hancock tower, she exclaimed:

> Look. Beautiful, isn't it? How could we ever leave here? We have everything. Even our own Christmas tree every day of the ye.

DISCOURSES

Reviving an Inner City Community is a special edition of *Discourses*, a series of papers and reports published by the faculty of the department of political science at Loyola University in Chicago. The *Discourses* focus on American politics, public policy and political theory. Their purpose is to provide a forum for discussion of issues presented by faculty and visiting lecturers. Interested persons are invited to send comments on these published reports and to make suggestions regarding subjects for future *Discourses*.

1. *Politics, Crime and Society* by James Q. Wilson (19 pp.) 1976. $1.00

2. *The Future of Large, Older American Cities to the Year 2000* by Anthony Downs (21 pp.) 1977. $1.00

3. *Reviving an Inner City Community* by Ed Marciniak (72 pp.) 1977. $2.95

For inquiries, or copies of these publications, please write

Discourses
Dept. of Political Science, Room 601
Loyola University
820 N. Michigan Ave.
Chicago, Ill., 60611

Reviving an Inner City Community is a step by step report describing the way residents of East Humboldt Park, one of Chicago's oldest ethnic neighborhoods, came together to shape their future. East Humboldt Park is a microcosm of the powerful influences that are transforming not only Chicago but also large cities everywhere. As a portrait in miniature of urban neglect and plans for revitalization, East Humboldt Park's prospects reflect the future of Chicago itself. If urban neighborhoods fail to work, will cities themselves survive as centers for the good life?

In this book Ed Marciniak chronicles this northwest side community's history as an early port of entry for Polish immigrants and later for Puerto Ricans and Mexicans; its turmoil in the midst of racial change and economic decline; and its strategies for dealing with downtown financial interests and government. The book zeroes in on current theories that dominate the practice of neighborhood organizing, planning and renewal. Marciniak is president of the Institute of Urban Life and professor of urban studies at Loyola University in Chicago. He was formerly the director of the Chicago Commission on Human Relations and later deputy commissioner of the Department of Development and Planning.